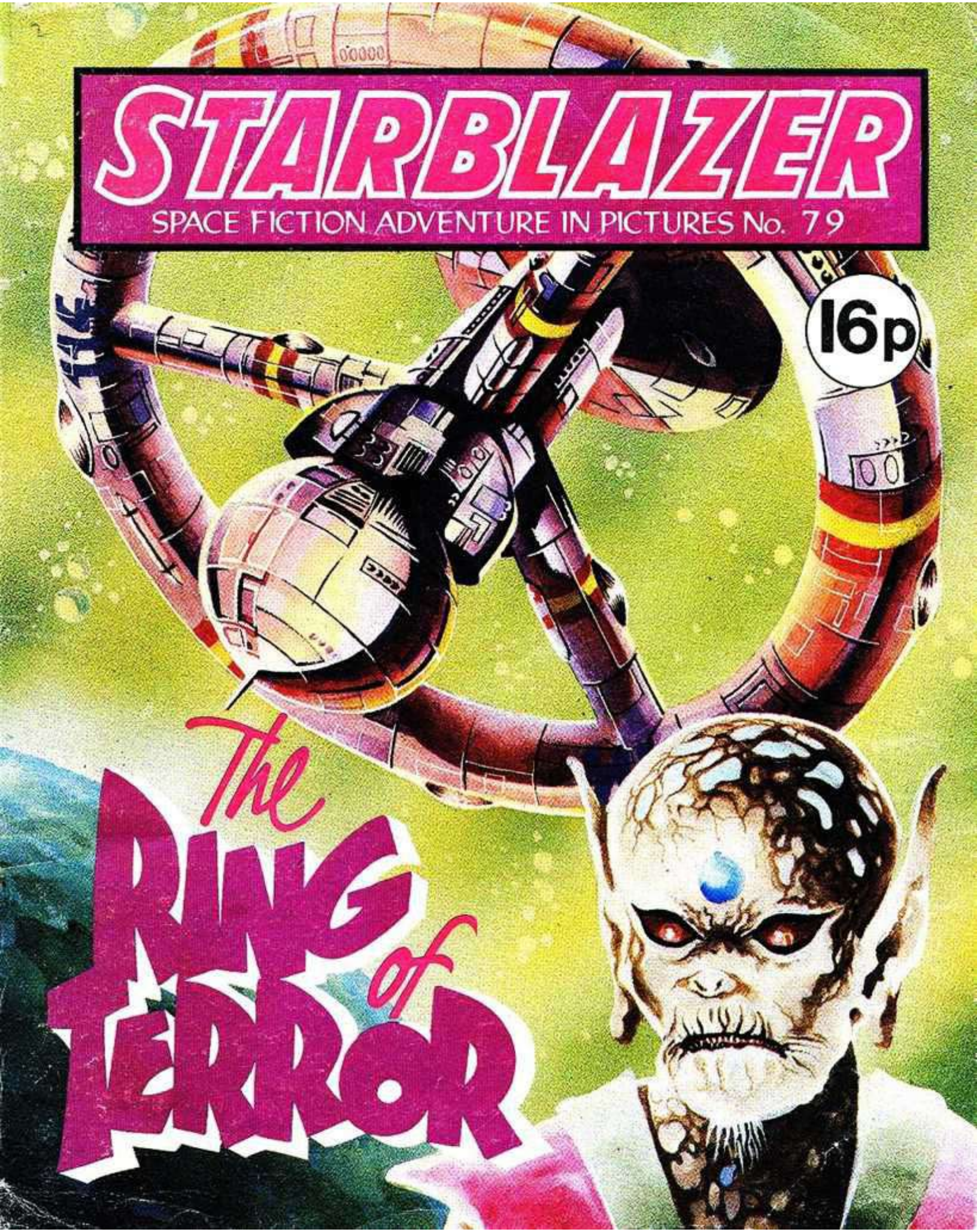
STARBLAZER

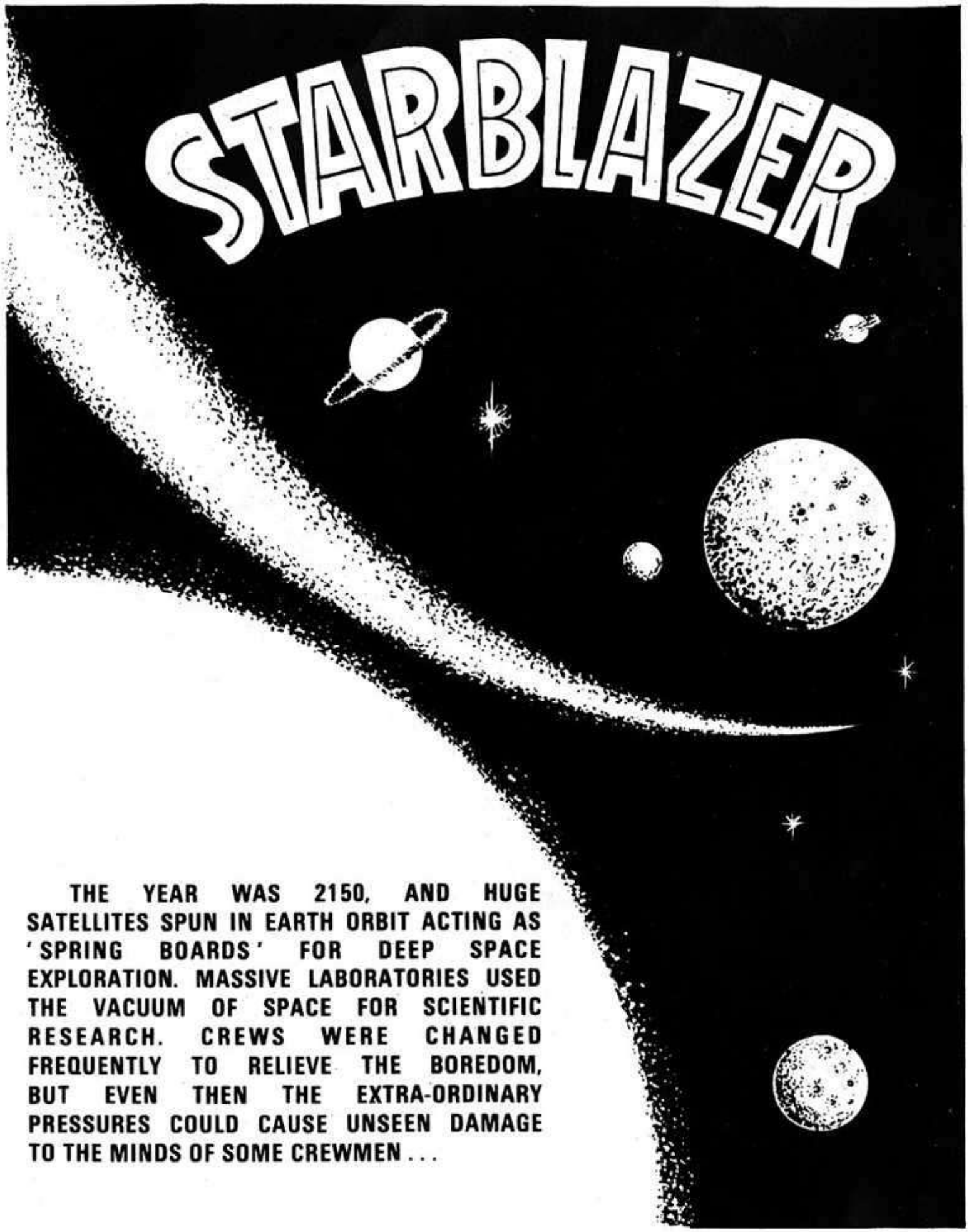
SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 79

16p

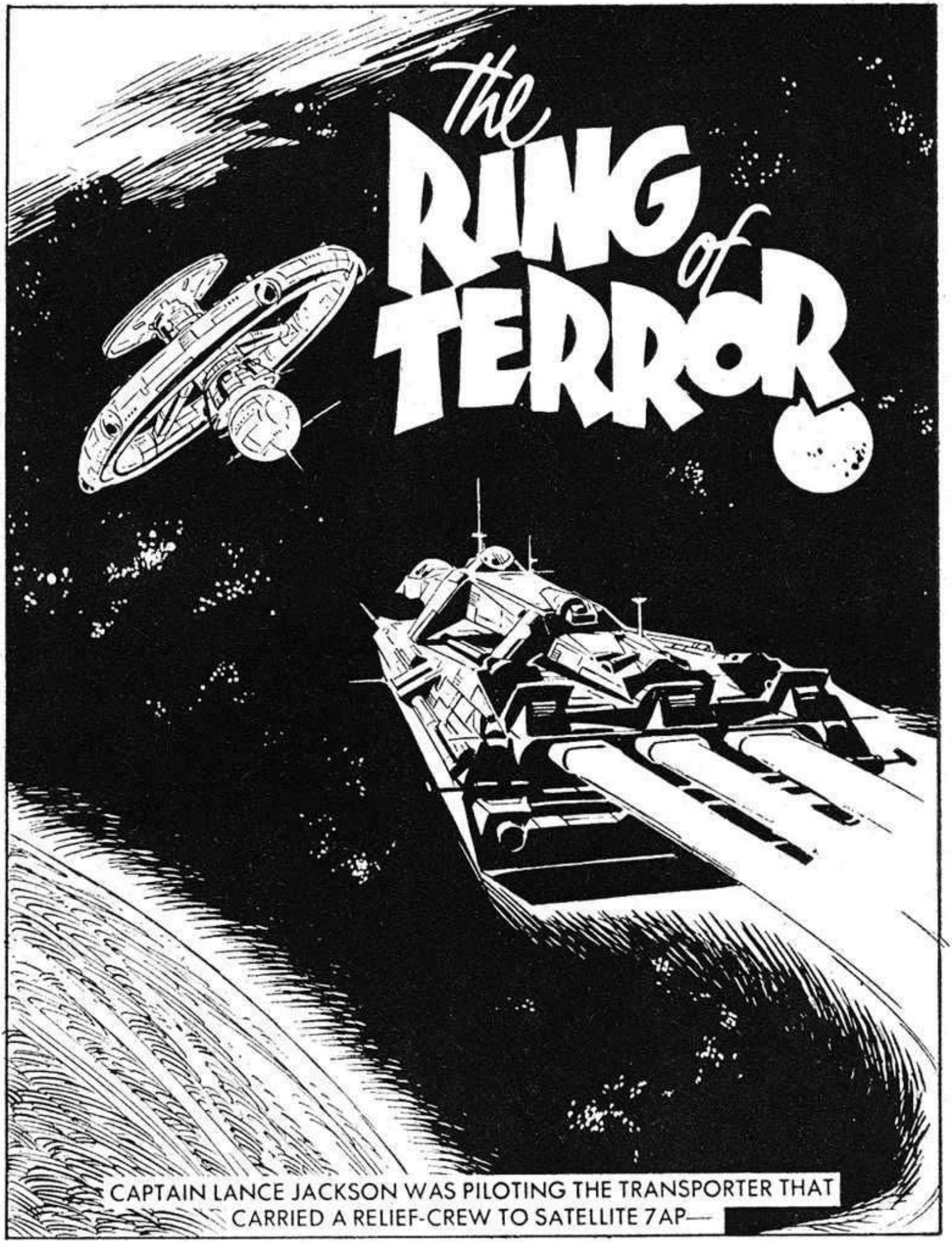


The RING of TERROR

STARBLAZER

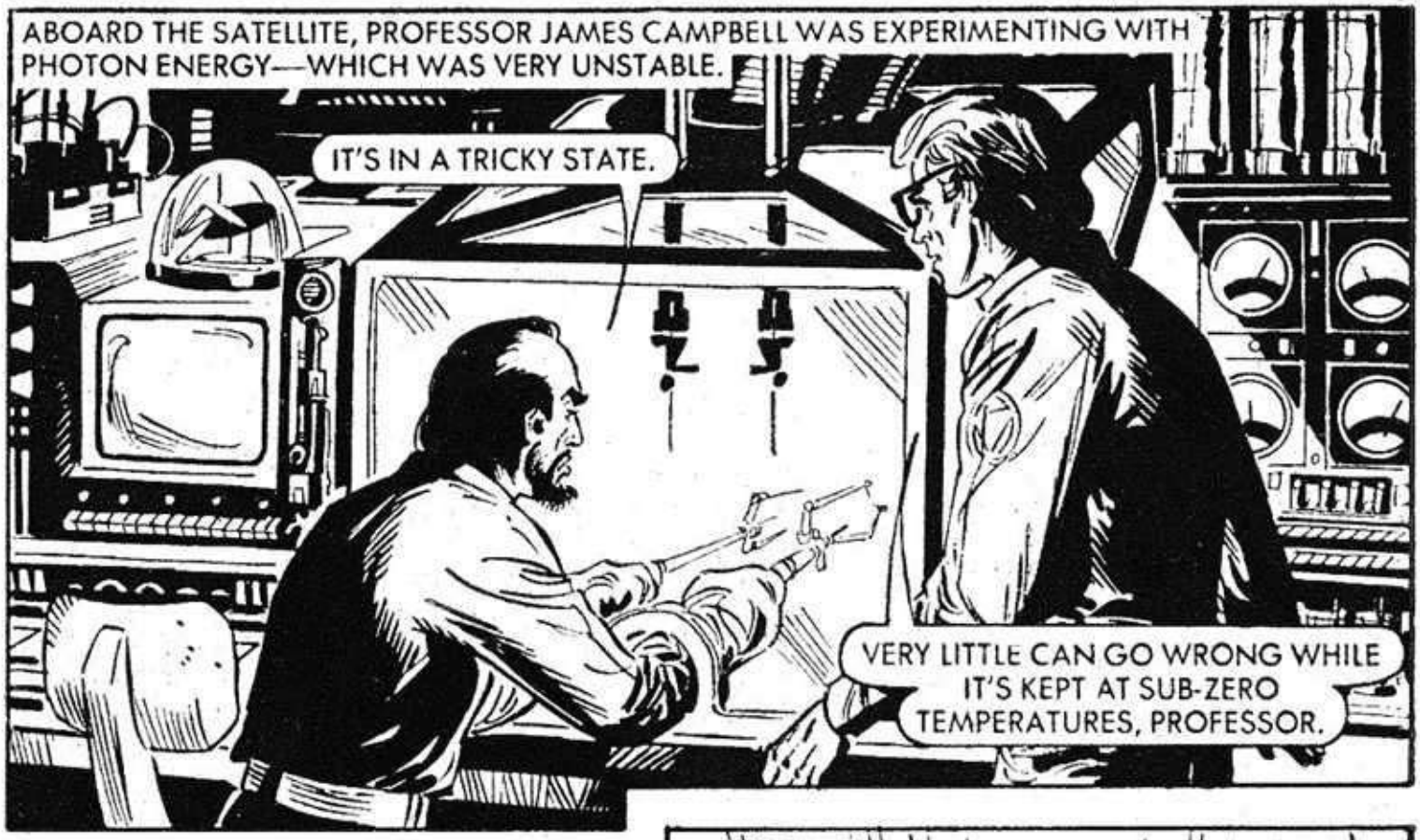


THE YEAR WAS 2150, AND HUGE SATELLITES SPUN IN EARTH ORBIT ACTING AS 'SPRING BOARDS' FOR DEEP SPACE EXPLORATION. MASSIVE LABORATORIES USED THE VACUUM OF SPACE FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH. CREWS WERE CHANGED FREQUENTLY TO RELIEVE THE BOREDOM, BUT EVEN THEN THE EXTRA-ORDINARY PRESSURES COULD CAUSE UNSEEN DAMAGE TO THE MINDS OF SOME CREWMEN . . .


the RING of TERROR
CAPTAIN LANCE JACKSON WAS PILOTING THE TRANSPORTER THAT CARRIED A RELIEF-CREW TO SATELLITE 7AP—

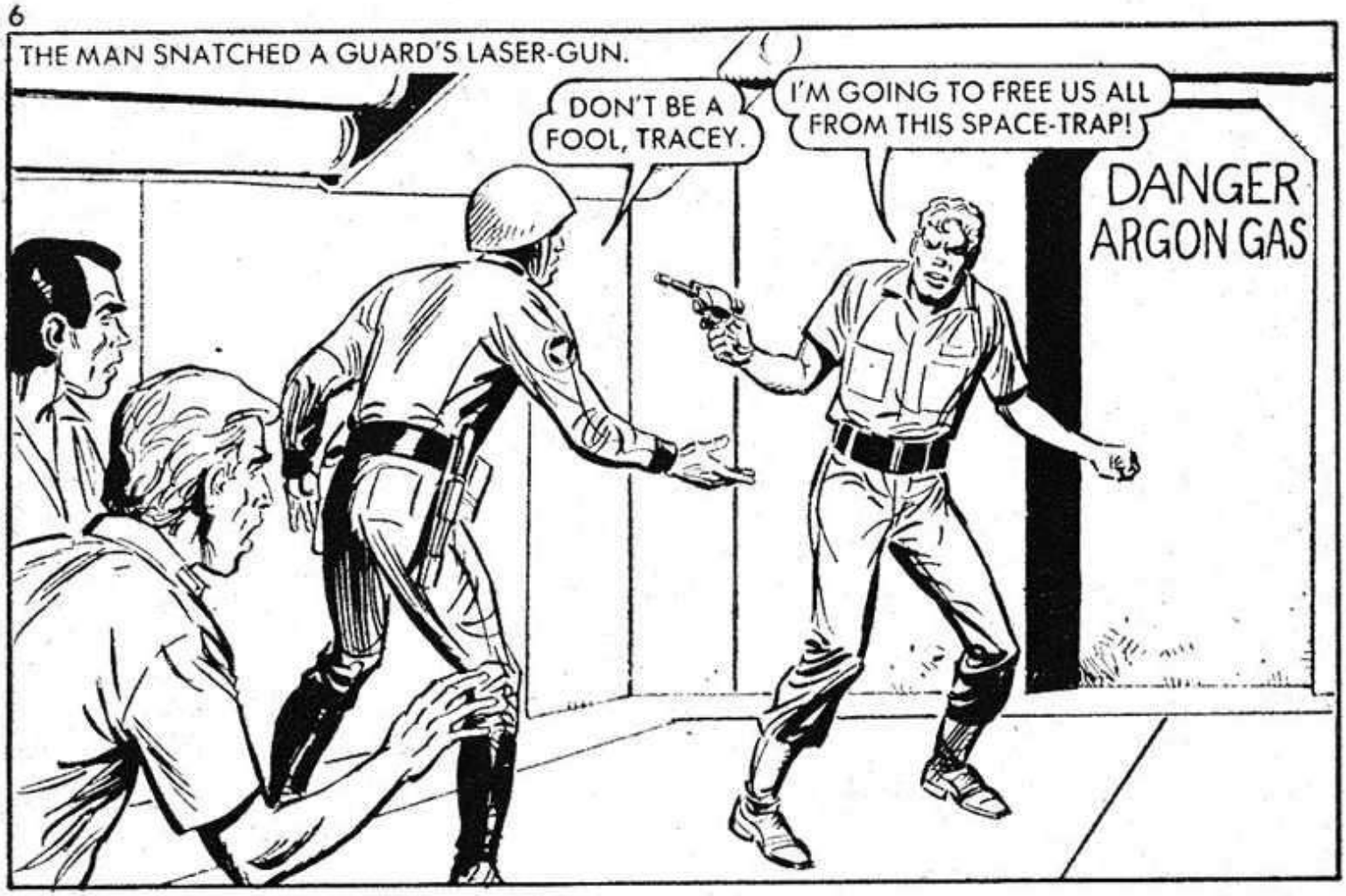
THANK JUPE I'M ONLY THE PILOT. I'D HATE BEING A LABTECH UP THERE.
IT'D BE OKAY UNLESS YOU GET AN UNCONTROLLABLE URGE TO GO OUT AND STRETCH YOUR LEGS!
LANCE
SAM

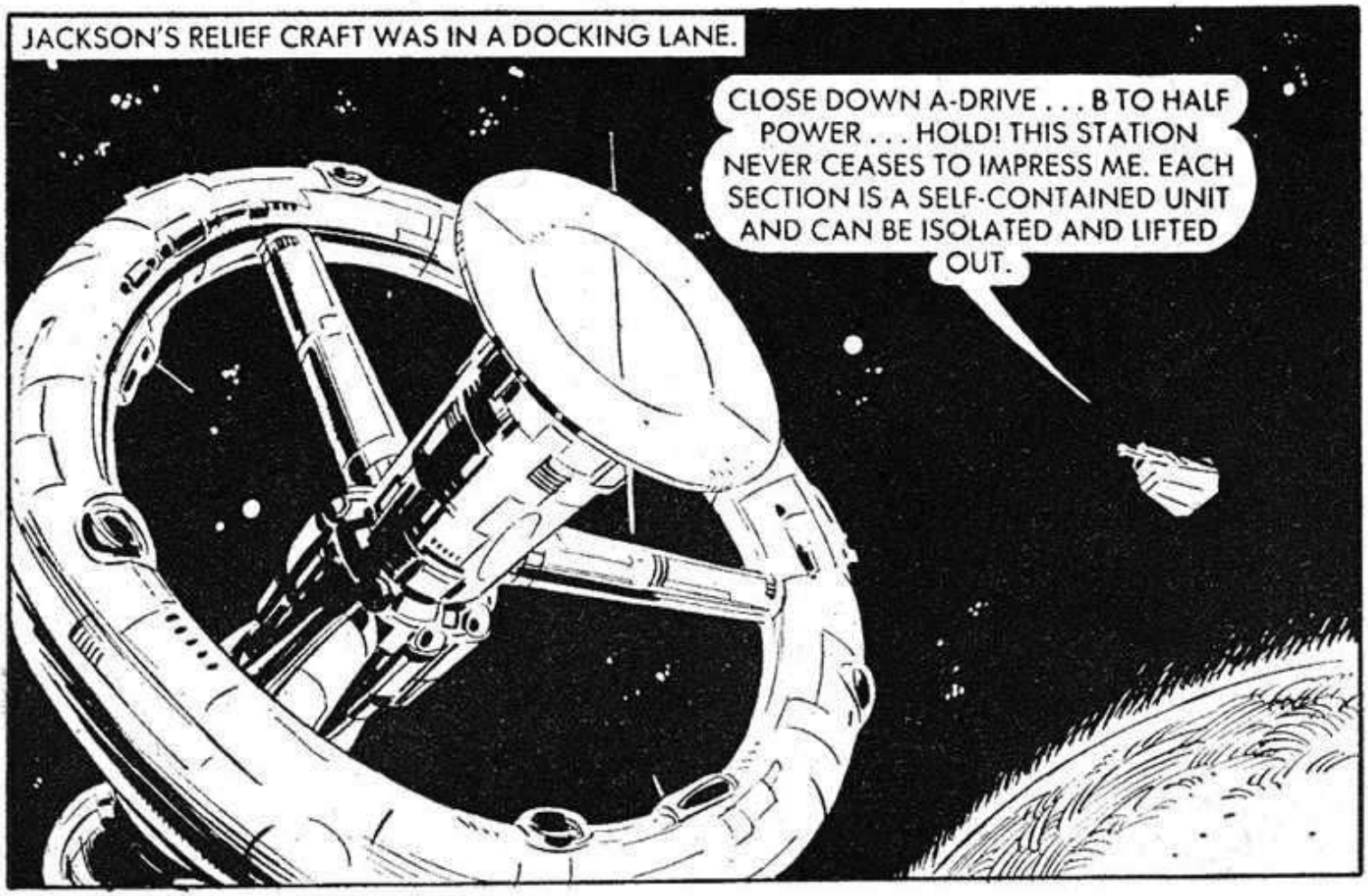
IF ONE OF THOSE TECHNICIANS FLIPPED, THERE'D BE NO TELLING WHAT DAMAGE HE COULD DO.


ABOARD THE SATELLITE, PROFESSOR JAMES CAMPBELL WAS EXPERIMENTING WITH PHOTON ENERGY—WHICH WAS VERY UNSTABLE.
IT'S IN A TRICKY STATE.
VERY LITTLE CAN GO WRONG WHILE IT'S KEPT AT SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES, PROFESSOR.

AT THAT MOMENT, IN THE SATELLITE REST ROOM.
YOU WIN AGAIN . . . I'M GOING TO BEAT YOU INTO A MILLION ATOMS.
YOU'RE CRAZY, I . . .

GET HIM!
YOU'RE NOT TOUCHING ME.

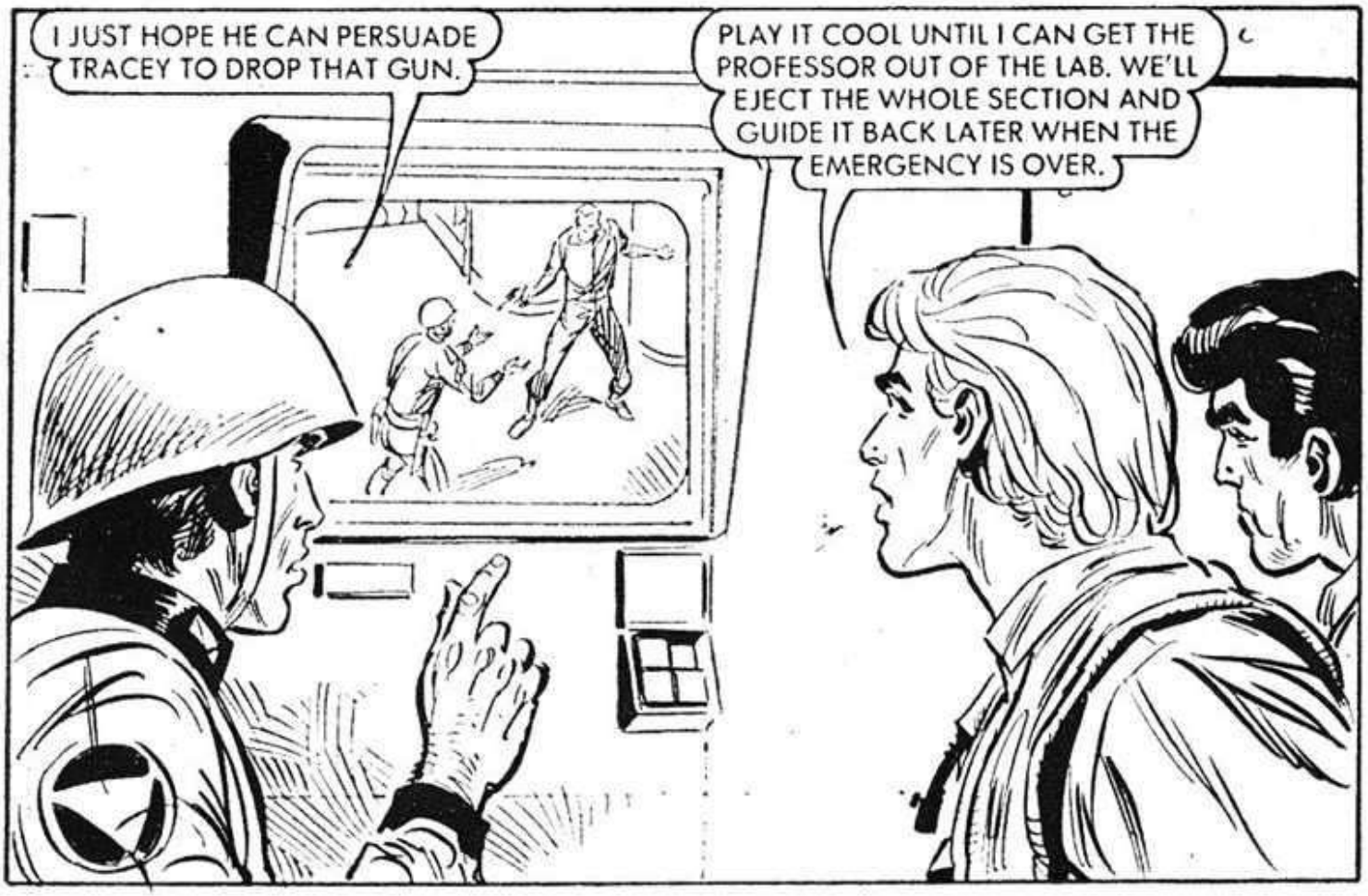

THE MAN SNATCHED A GUARD'S LASER-GUN.
DON'T BE A FOOL, TRACEY.
I'M GOING TO FREE US ALL FROM THIS SPACE-TRAP!
DANGER ARGON GAS


JACKSON'S RELIEF CRAFT WAS IN A DOCKING LANE.
CLOSE DOWN A-DRIVE . . . B TO HALF POWER . . . HOLD! THIS STATION NEVER CEASES TO IMPRESS ME. EACH SECTION IS A SELF-CONTAINED UNIT AND CAN BE ISOLATED AND LIFTED OUT.

TAKE HER IN SLOWLY!

AS THEY CAME THROUGH AN AIRLOCK FROM THE DOCKING-AREA—
WHAT'S GOING ON?
EMERGENCY—ONE OF THE TECHNICIANS HAS FLIPPED—GONE INTO THE ARGON GAS STORE WITH A LASER-GUN!
ALERT
LANCE!

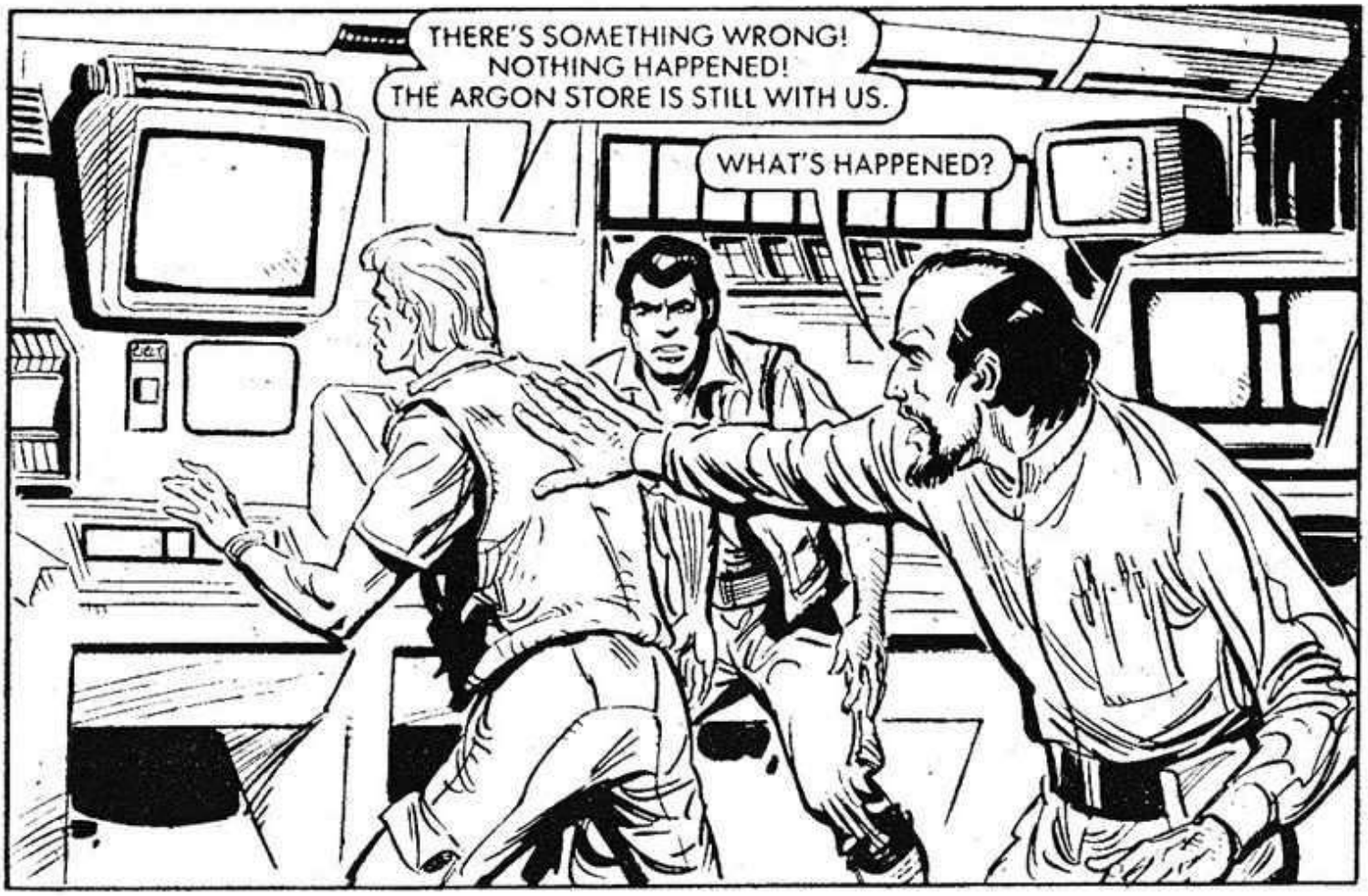
THAT ARGON STORE BACKS ONTO THE LAB! LET'S TRY TO GET THE PROFESSOR AND HIS ASSISTANT OUT OF THERE.


I JUST HOPE HE CAN PERSUADE TRACEY TO DROP THAT GUN.
PLAY IT COOL UNTIL I CAN GET THE PROFESSOR OUT OF THE LAB. WE'LL EJECT THE WHOLE SECTION AND GUIDE IT BACK LATER WHEN THE EMERGENCY IS OVER.

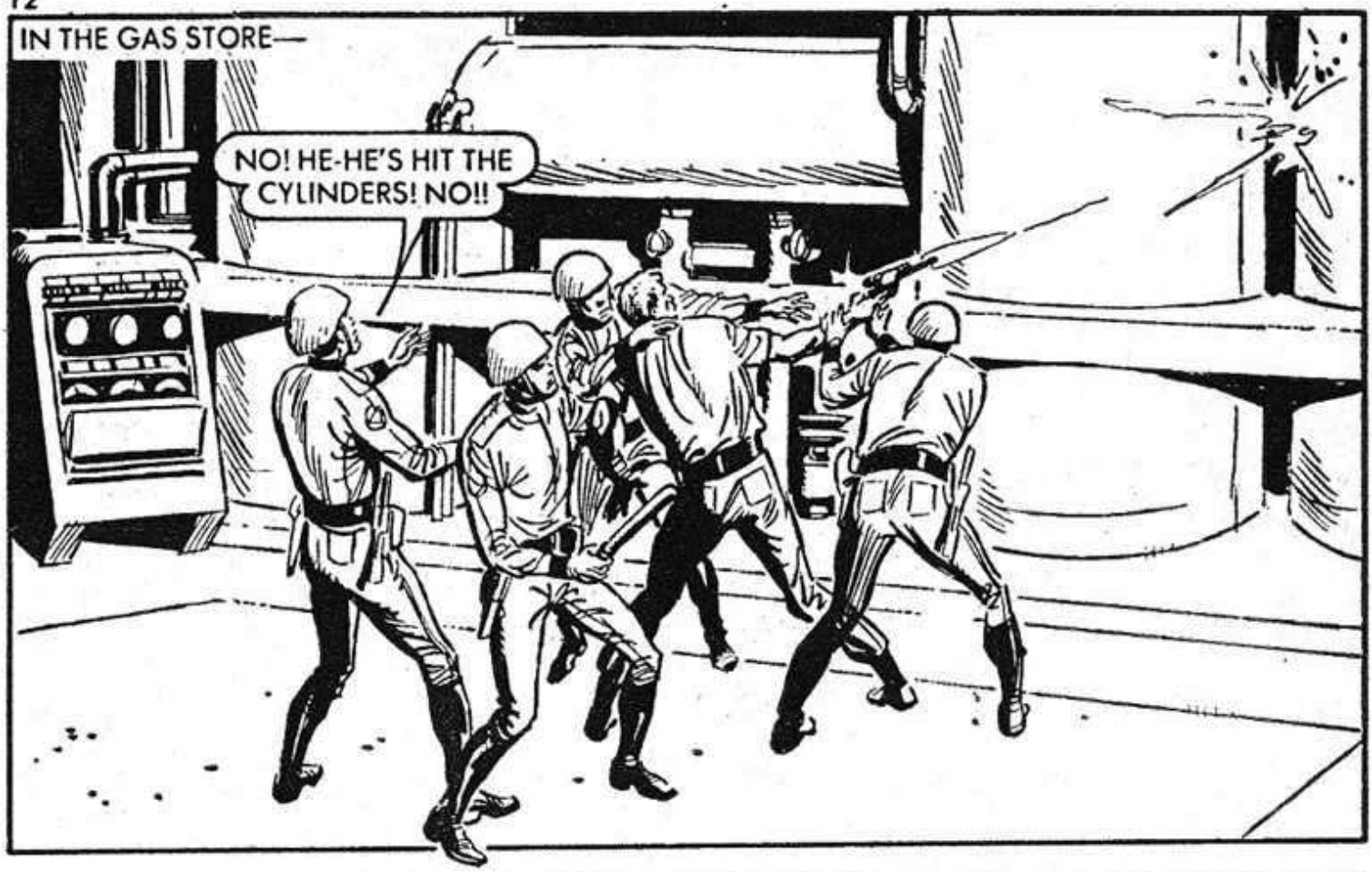
SECONDS LATER—
PROFESSOR! GET OUT OF HERE—THERE'S TROUBLE IN THE ARGON STORE. THIS WHOLE SECTION COULD . . .
NOT NOW! THIS IS A DELICATE OPERATION.

WE'D BETTER EJECT WHILE WE CAN. IF ONE OF THOSE SHOTS HITS THE ARGON GAS CYLINDERS IT'S ANYONE'S GUESS WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

THEY'RE HAVING TROUBLE SUBDUING HIM, LANCE. HE'S REALLY GONE BERSERK.
EJECT
LANCE PRESSED THE EJECT BUTTON—


THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG! NOTHING HAPPENED! THE ARGON STORE IS STILL WITH US.
WHAT'S HAPPENED?

THE LAB HAD EJECTED BUT THE ARGON STORE WAS WITH IT—THE RELEASE LATCHES HADN'T WORKED.

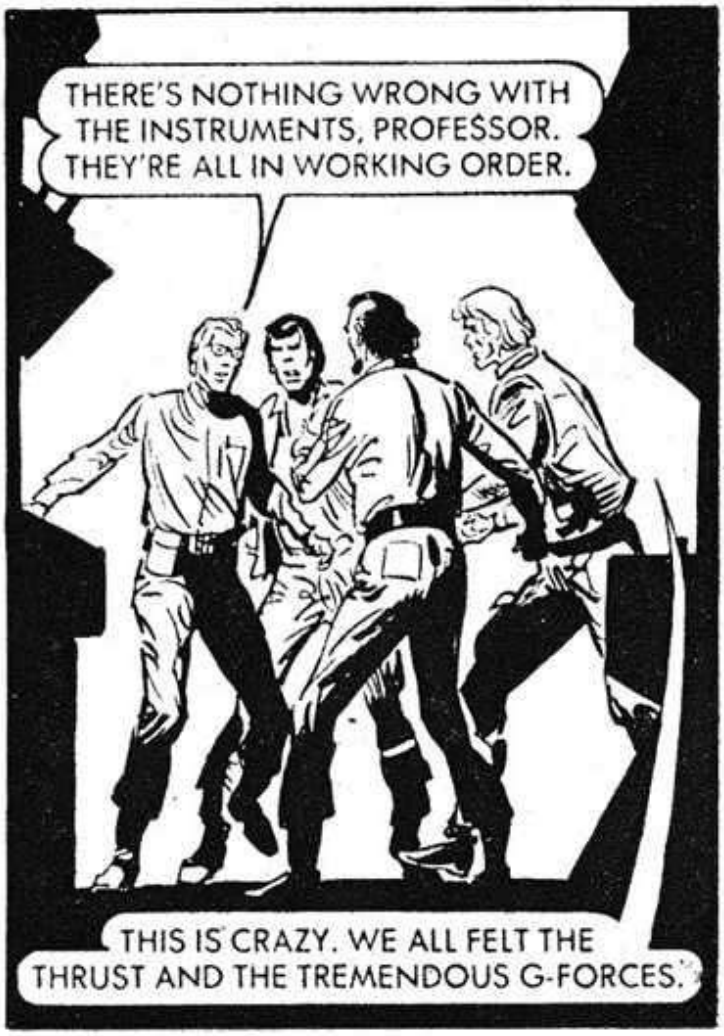

IN THE GAS STORE—
NO! HE-HE'S HIT THE CYLINDERS! NO!!

THE SEARING HEAT OF THE LASER CAUSED THE ARGON TO IGNITE—A FIREFLASH!

WHICH WAS EXACTLY HOW AN UNSTABLE PHOTON CORE WAS IGNITED TO GIVE THRUST FOR EXPERIMENTAL WARP DRIVE CRAFT.

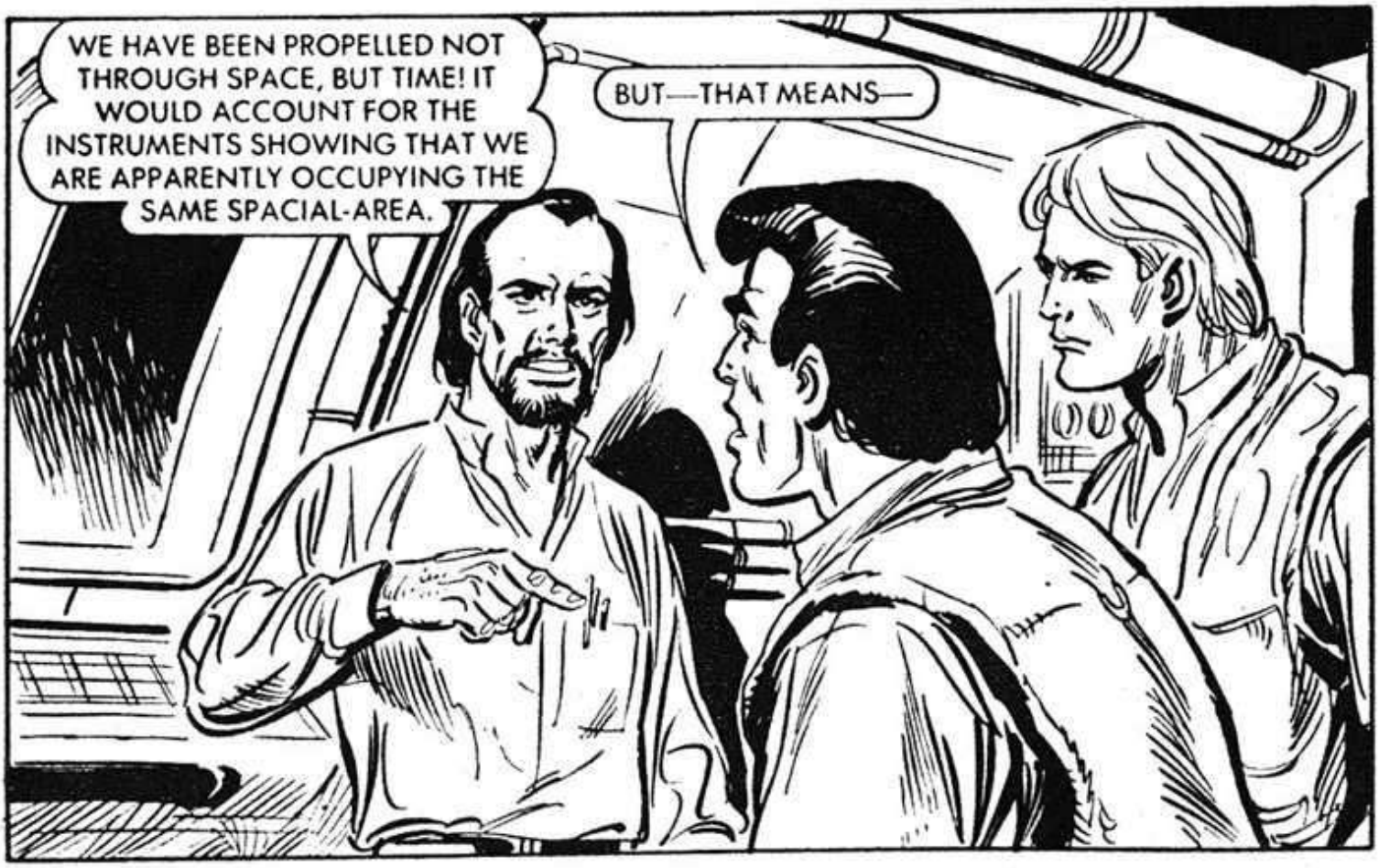
MIND-BENDING SECONDS LATER—
WH-WHAT HAPPENED? I'VE NEVER KNOWN G-FORCES LIKE THAT BEFORE! WHERE ARE WE?
WE—WE SHOULD GET SOME KIND OF READING FROM THE CONTROL PANEL.

I DON'T GET IT! ACCORDING TO THE READINGS, WE HAVEN'T MOVED!
IT'S NOT POSSIBLE. AFTER A BLAST LIKE THAT WE SHOULD BE AT LEAST ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM.


THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THE INSTRUMENTS, PROFESSOR. THEY'RE ALL IN WORKING ORDER.
THIS IS CRAZY. WE ALL FELT THE THRUST AND THE TREMENDOUS G-FORCES.

THERE'S NO SIGN OF EARTH OR THE SATELLITE! IF WE HAVEN'T MOVED— THEN WERE HAVE THEY GONE?

THEY HAVEN'T GONE . . . WE HAVE!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY, PROFESSOR?

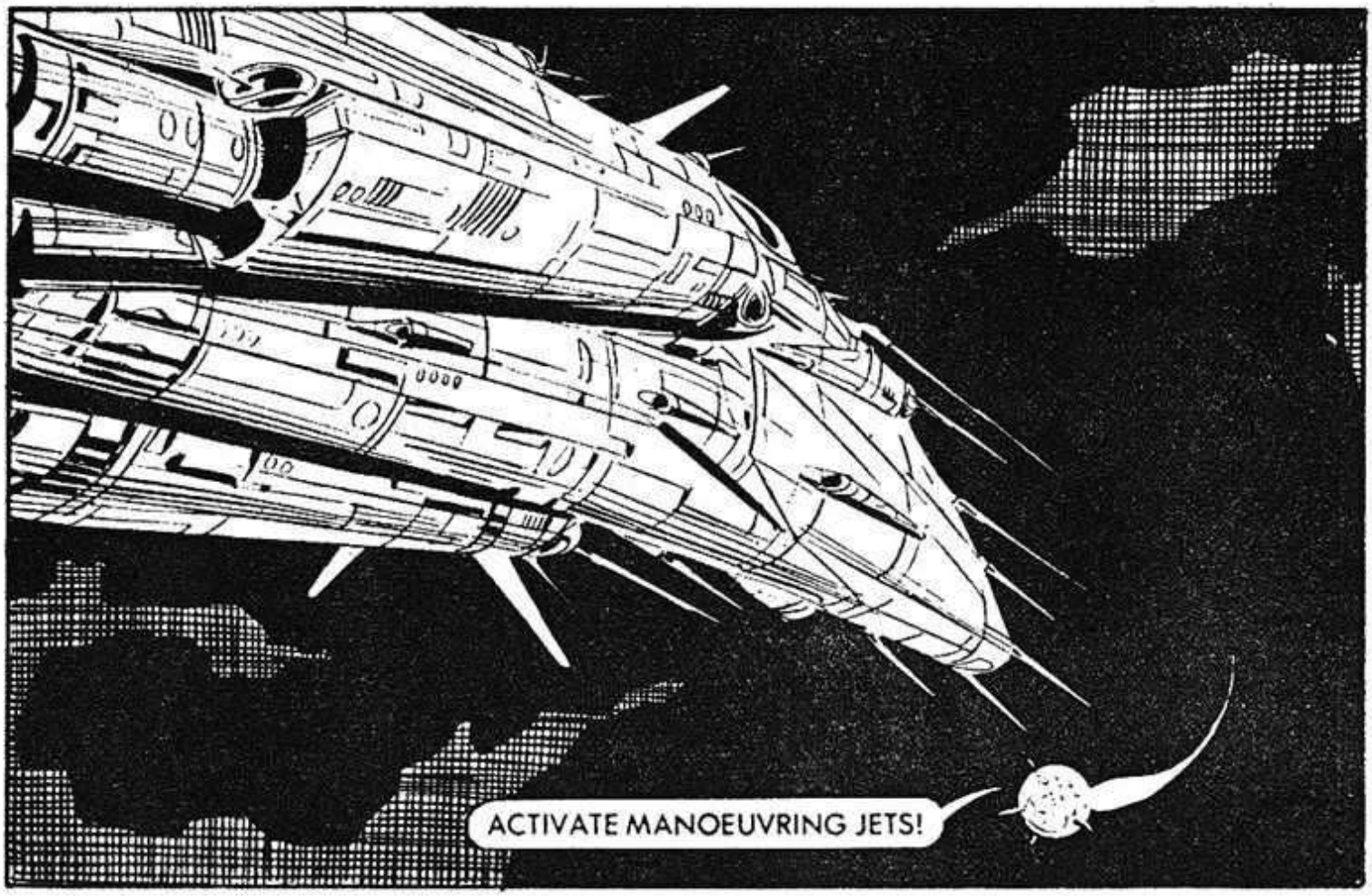

WE HAVE BEEN PROPELLED NOT THROUGH SPACE, BUT TIME! IT WOULD ACCOUNT FOR THE INSTRUMENTS SHOWING THAT WE ARE APPARENTLY OCCUPYING THE SAME SPACIAL-AREA.
BUT—THAT MEANS—

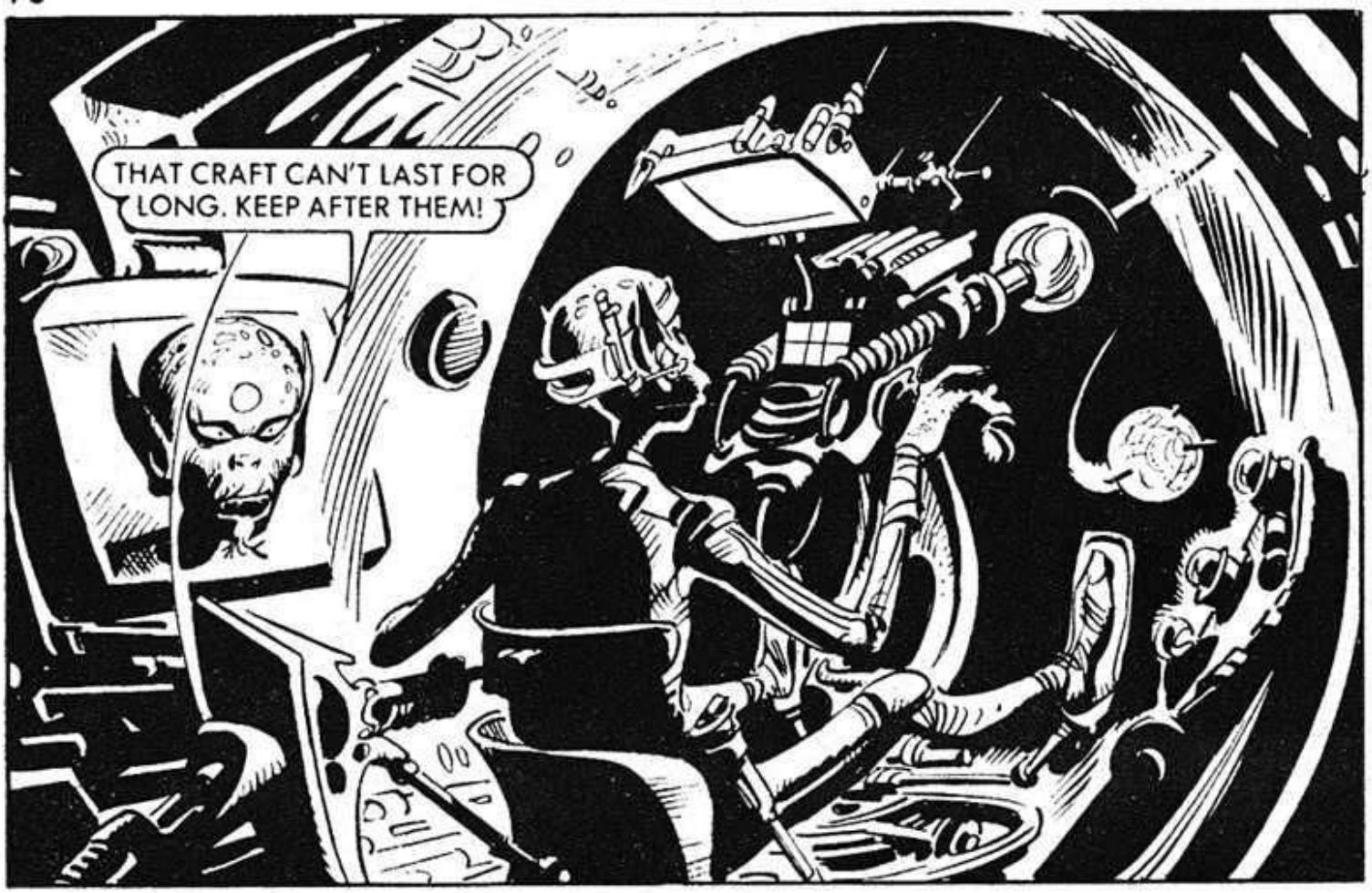
WE'RE TRAPPED! THIS CAPSULE IS DESIGNED FOR NORMAL SPACE MANOEUVRING BUT THAT'S ABOUT ALL. WE'VE NO EMERGENCY SUPPLIES.
WE'LL DIE. IT WOULD TAKE A MILLION LIFETIMES TO FLY BACK AT THE SPEED THIS THING CAN MUSTER.

THE SCANNER IS REGISTERING ANOTHER CRAFT! IT'S HEADING STRAIGHT FOR US!

ON THE CRAFT—
UNIDENTIFIED CRAFT APPROACHING, SURKON!
IT COULD BE A PENAL INSPECTION UNIT. BLAST THEM INTO ETERNITY! DESTROY THEM!

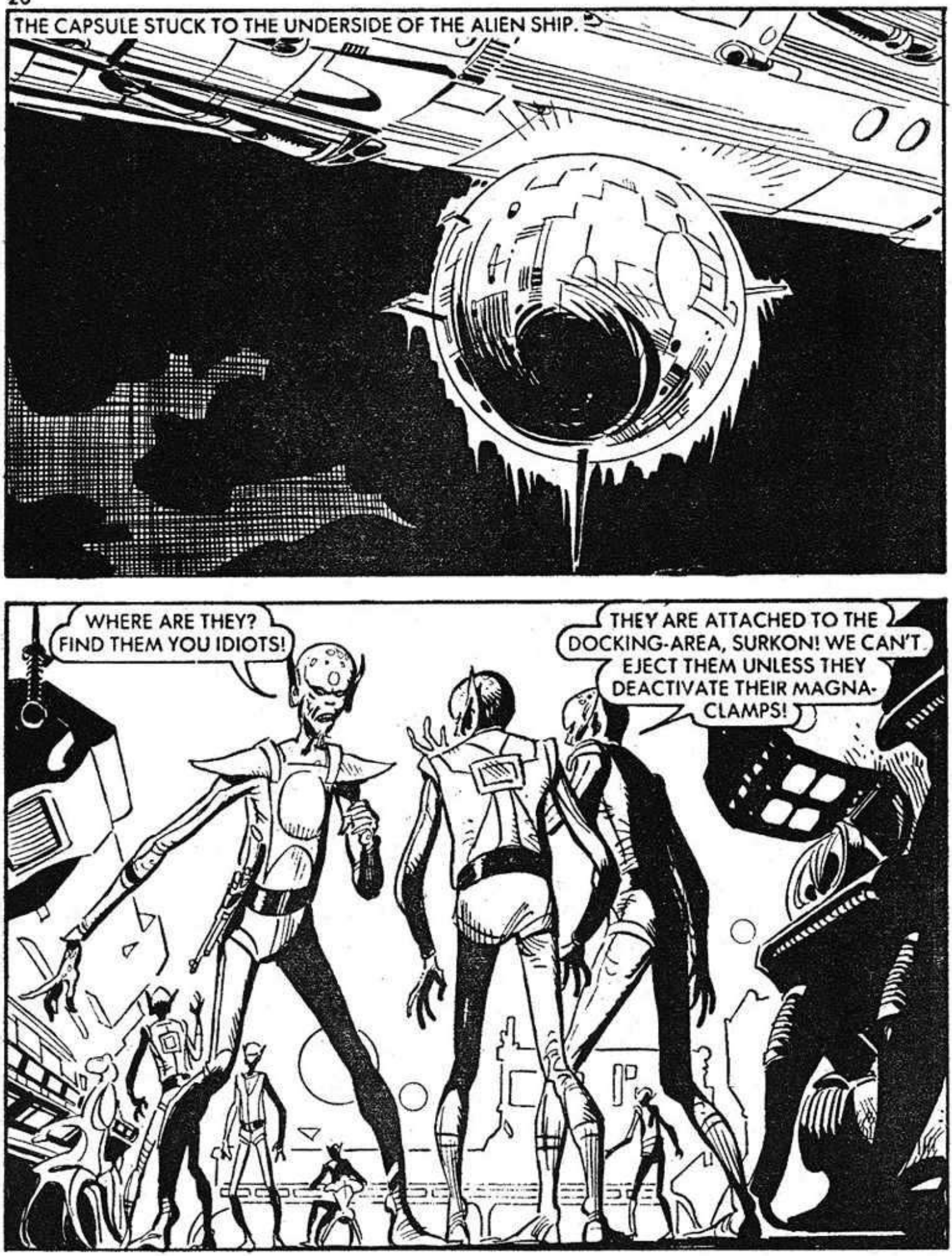
THEY'RE FIRING AT US!


ACTIVATE MANOEUVRING JETS!


THAT CRAFT CAN'T LAST FOR LONG. KEEP AFTER THEM!

WE'RE IN TROUBLE. THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO IF WE'RE TO SURVIVE. HOLD TIGHT—WE'RE ABOUT TO DO SOME FANCY LOOPING, GENTLEMEN . . .

WHAT ARE THOSE FOOLS DOING? THEY'VE TURNED THEIR CRAFT RIGHT UNDERNEATH US!
ACTIVATE MAGNA-CLAMPS —FAST!


THE CAPSULE STUCK TO THE UNDERSIDE OF THE ALIEN SHIP.
WHERE ARE THEY? FIND THEM YOU IDIOTS!
THEY ARE ATTACHED TO THE DOCKING-AREA, SURKON! WE CAN'T EJECT THEM UNLESS THEY DEACTIVATE THEIR MAGNA-CLAMPS!

IT'S A DIRECT CHALLENGE. WE CAN ONLY REACH THEM BY OPENING THE ENTRY-CHAMBER . . .

VERY WELL! FOUR OF YOU FOLLOW ME. WE SHALL DESTROY THEM INSIDE THEIR OWN CRAFT.

IN THE CAPSULE—
THEY'RE GOING TO COME IN BLASTING—IT'S THEIR ONLY CHOICE IF THEY WANT TO GET THIS THING AWAY FROM THEIR DOCKING MECHANISM.
WE DON'T STAND MUCH OF A CHANCE, LANCE. THEY'VE GOT THE ADVANTAGE. WE'VE NO HIDING-PLACE ON THIS THING.

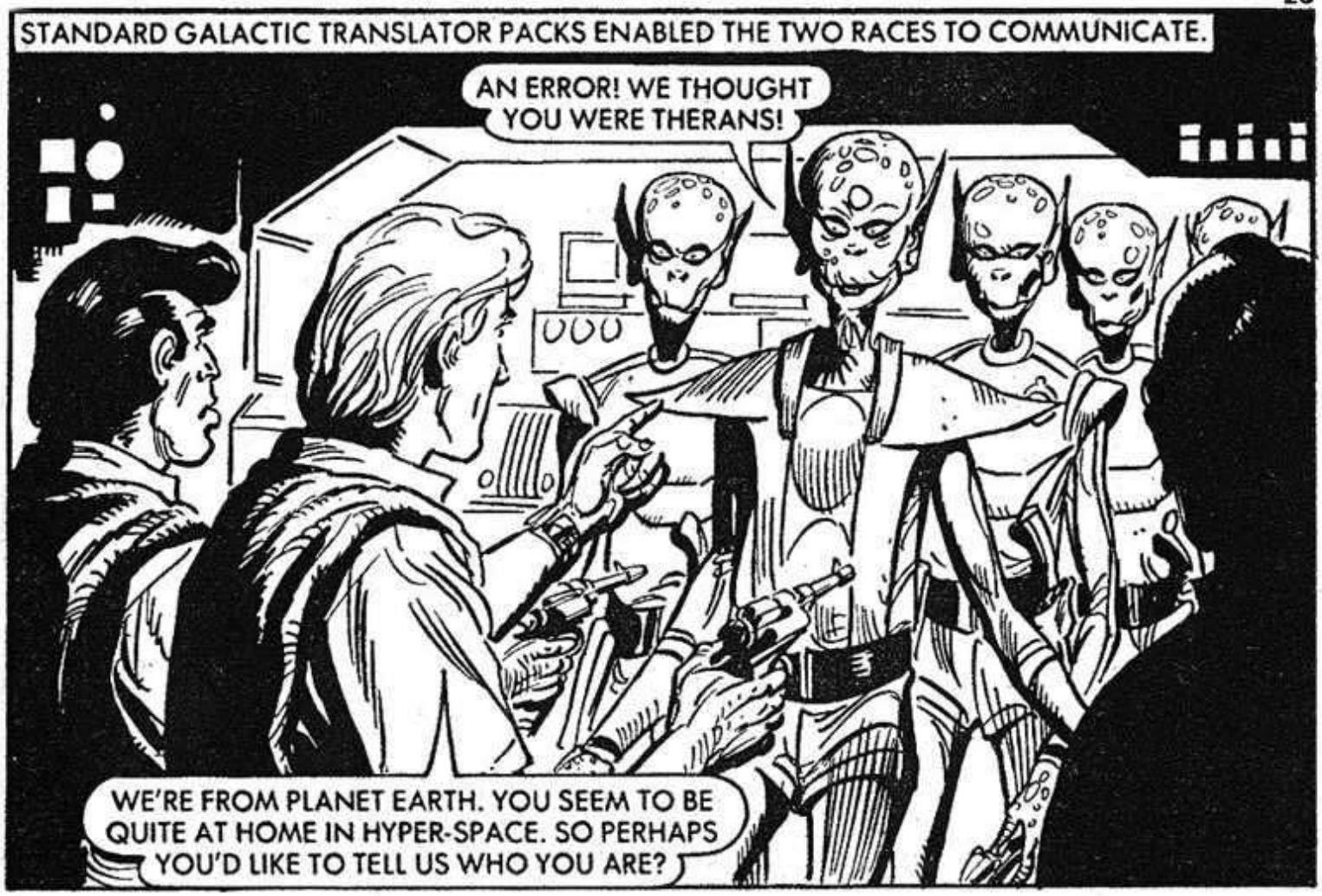
I'VE AN IDEA THAT MIGHT BUY US A GOOD CHANCE. THAT REFLECTOR—HELP ME DISMANTLE IT.

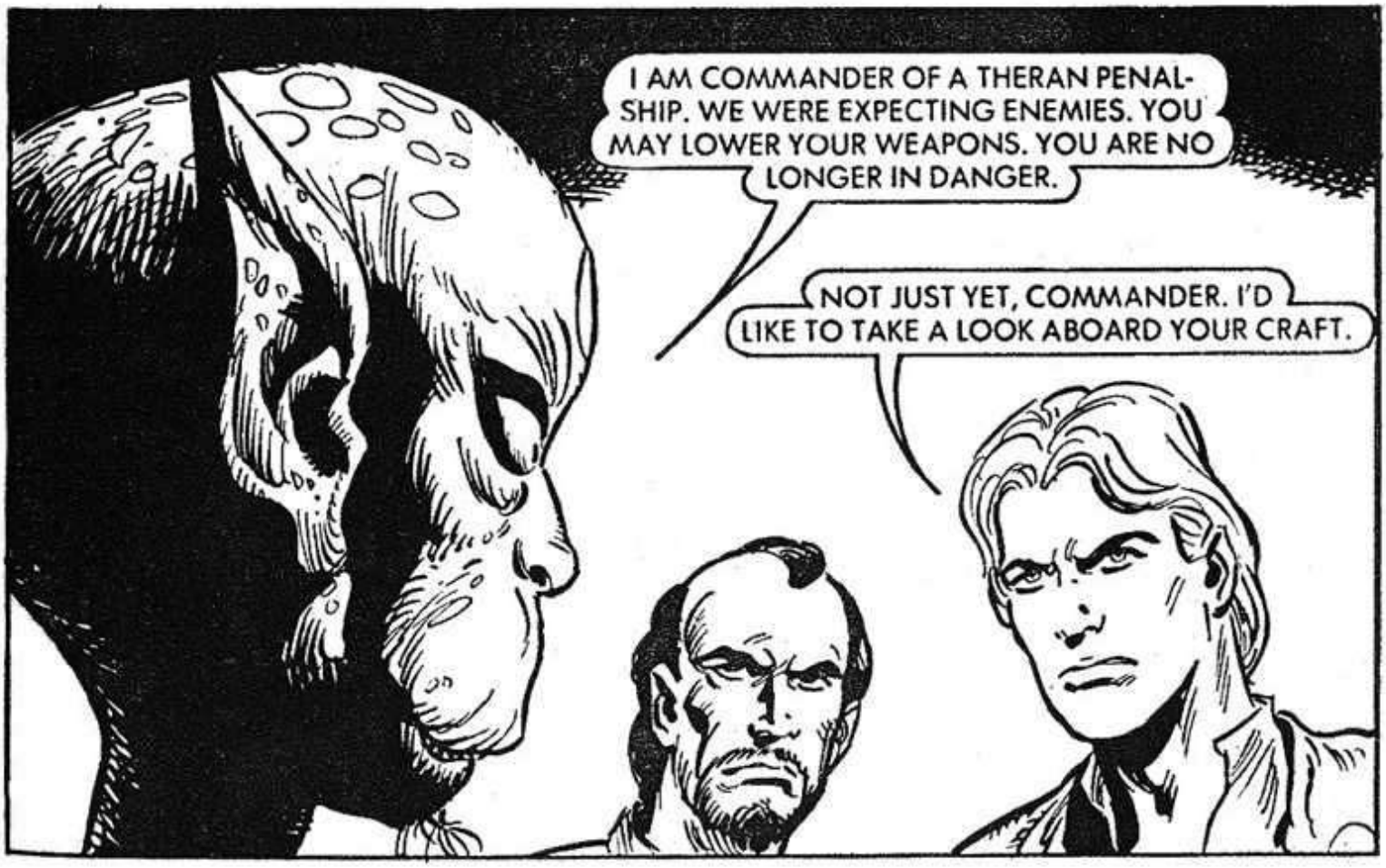
A FEW MINUTES LATER—
AS SOON AS I RELEASE THE AIRLOCK DOORS, RUSH THEM. DON'T GIVE THEM A SINGLE CHANCE. KILL THEM ALL!

KILL!!!

WHA—!

DROP YOUR WEAPONS! NOT A VERY WARM WELCOME FOR WEARY SPACE-TRAVELLERS.


STANDARD GALACTIC TRANSLATOR PACKS ENABLED THE TWO RACES TO COMMUNICATE.
AN ERROR! WE THOUGHT YOU WERE THERANS!
WE'RE FROM PLANET EARTH. YOU SEEM TO BE QUITE AT HOME IN HYPER-SPACE. SO PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO TELL US WHO YOU ARE?


I AM COMMANDER OF A THERAN PENAL-SHIP. WE WERE EXPECTING ENEMIES. YOU MAY LOWER YOUR WEAPONS. YOU ARE NO LONGER IN DANGER.
NOT JUST YET, COMMANDER. I'D LIKE TO TAKE A LOOK ABOARD YOUR CRAFT.

STEP ABOARD, GENTLEMEN.
A PENAL-SHIP. A TOP SECURITY METHOD OF KEEPING DANGEROUS CRIMINALS AWAY FROM SOCIETY.
LANLE

YOU DON'T SEEM TOO HAPPY, LANCE. WHAT'S WORRYING YOU?
THE COMMANDER THOUGHT WE WERE THERANS AT FIRST. THEN HE SAID HE WAS EXPECTING ENEMIES. WHAT KIND OF MAN SHOOTS AT HIS OWN PEOPLE FIRST AND THEN ASKS QUESTIONS AFTERWARDS. I DON'T TRUST HIM, SAM.
LANC

KEEP THE SAFETY CATCH OFF YOUR WEAPON, SAM. WE MAY NEED TO ACT QUICKLY.

THIS IS THE CONTROL AREA OF THE SHIP. TELL ME HOW YOU CAME TO BE HERE— PERHAPS I CAN BE OF SOME HELP TO YOU.

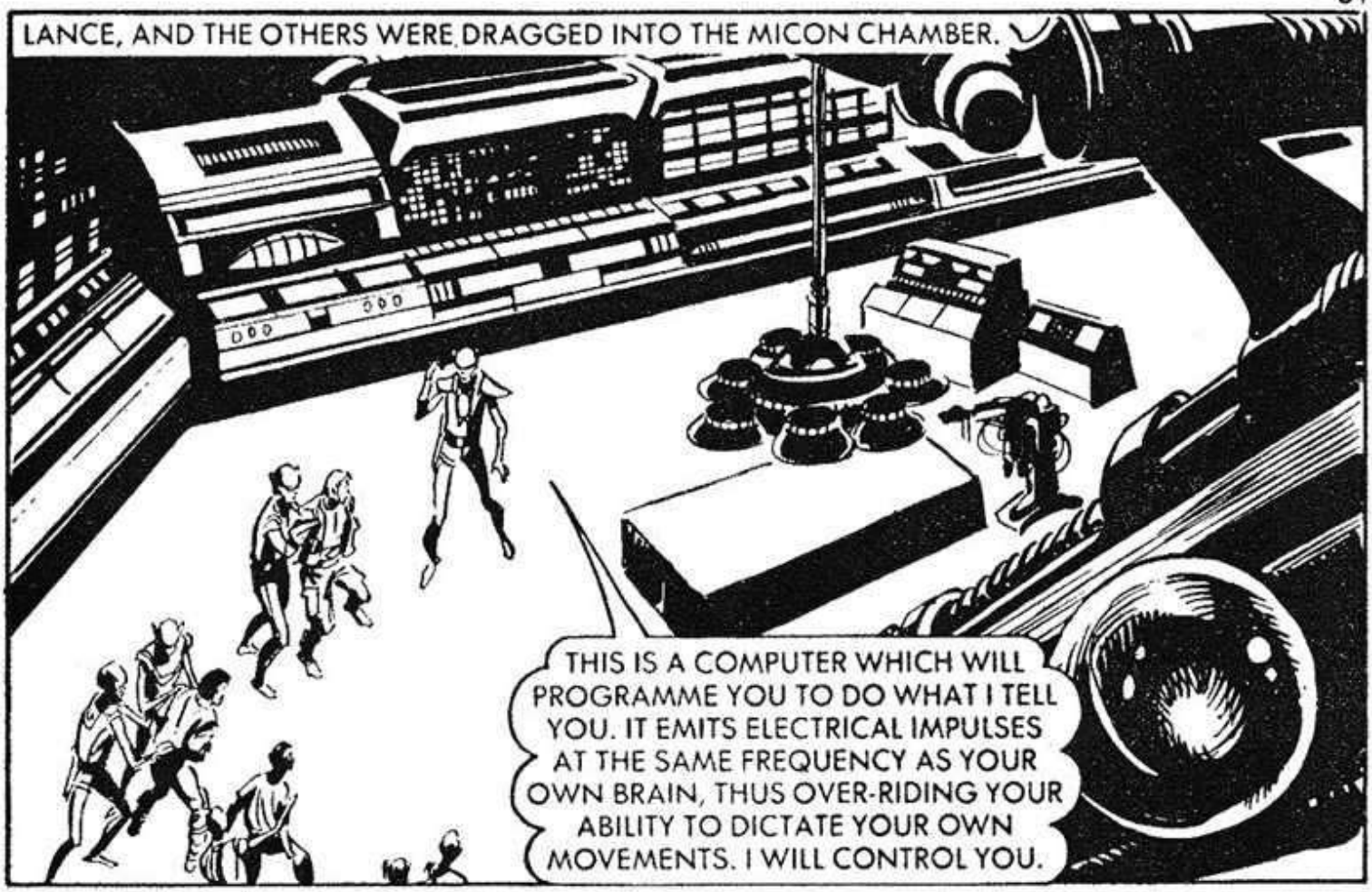
LANCE TOLD SURKON THE STORY OF THEIR TRIP INTO HYPER-SPACE.

SURKON DIRECTED THE PROFESSOR TO A CHAIR IN FRONT OF THE CONTROL BANK.
THIS IS THE COMMAND SEAT, FITTED WITH VOXCON. TRY FOR YOURSELF.

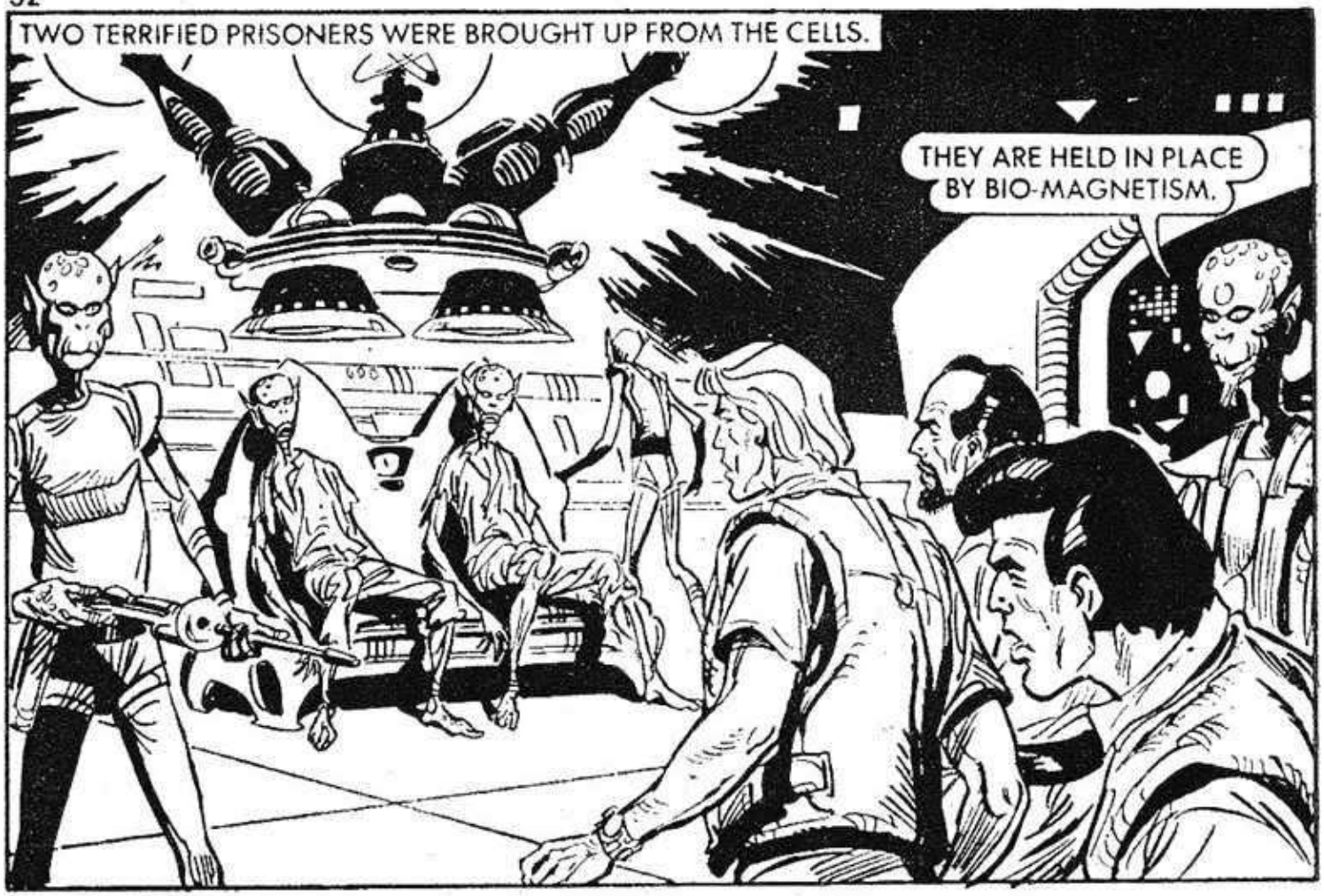
EVEN AS THE PROFESSOR TRIED THE COMMAND SEAT, A FORCE BARRIER SURROUNDED HIM—
WHA—!
NOW, EARTHMEN—DROP YOUR WEAPONS. ONE TOUCH OF THIS BUTTON AND YOUR PROFESSOR WILL HAVE HIS MOLECULAR STRUCTURE CHANGED.

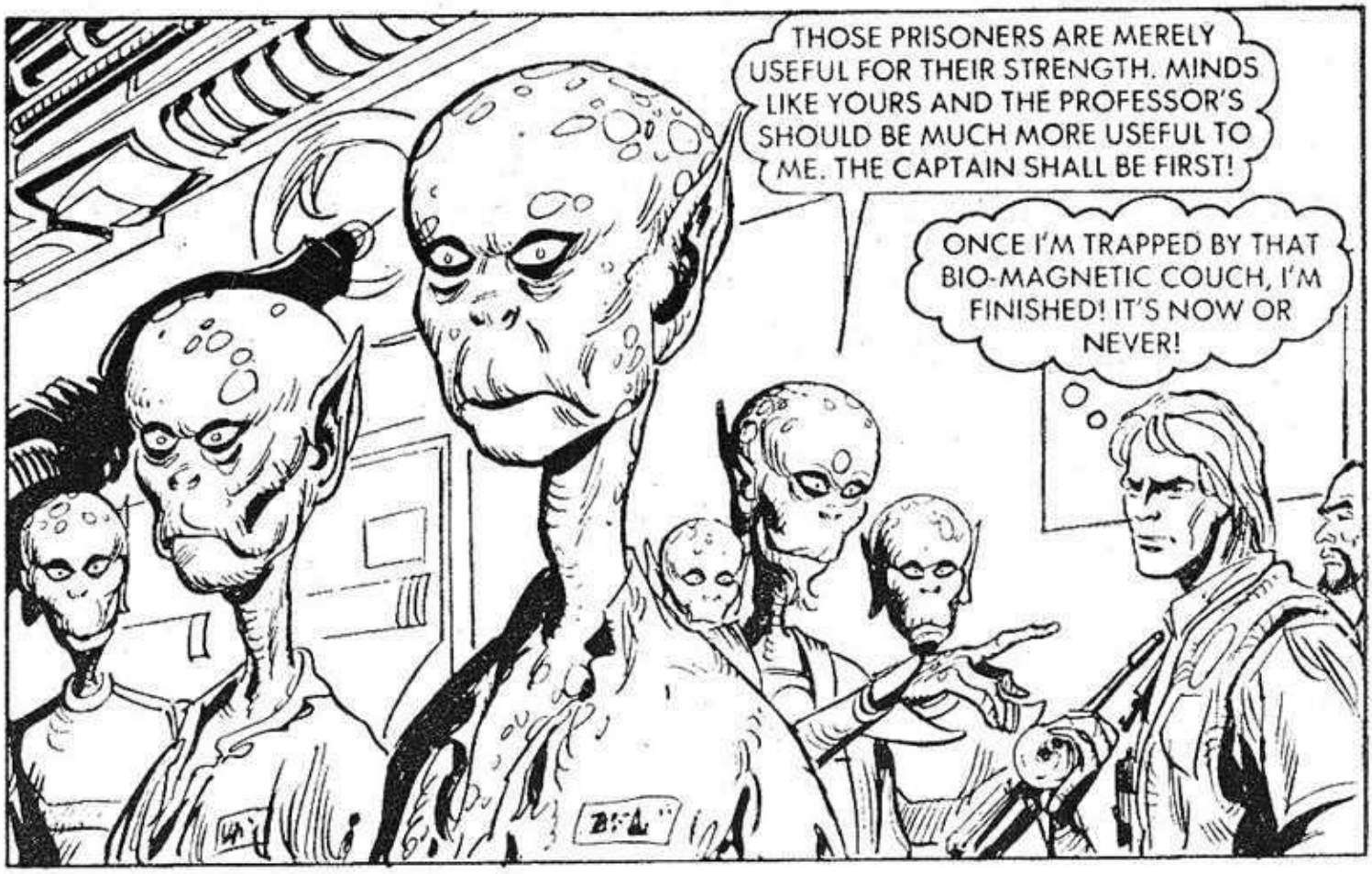
THIS IS A PENAL-SHIP! VOXCON—VOICE CONTROL—WORKS ONLY ON MY VOICE-PRINT. HOW ELSE COULD WE GUARANTEE SECURITY? WHEN ANY OTHER VOICE ATTEMPTS TO USE VOXCON, THE OPERATOR IS TRAPPED IN THE CHAIR!

TAKE THEM! NOW THEY SHALL SEE THE WORKINGS OF A TRULY INTELLIGENT MIND. RELEASE THE PROFESSOR AND TAKE HIM TO THE MICON CHAMBER.


LANCE, AND THE OTHERS WERE DRAGGED INTO THE MICON CHAMBER.
THIS IS A COMPUTER WHICH WILL PROGRAMME YOU TO DO WHAT I TELL YOU. IT EMITS ELECTRICAL IMPULSES AT THE SAME FREQUENCY AS YOUR OWN BRAIN, THUS OVER-RIDING YOUR ABILITY TO DICTATE YOUR OWN MOVEMENTS. I WILL CONTROL YOU.

WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT I SHALL RETURN TO THERA AND DESTROY THE PEOPLE THAT BANISHED ME TO THIS CRAFT. I SHALL TAKE OVER. OUR VISITORS SHALL HAVE A DEMONSTRATION—BRING UP SOME PATIENTS.


TWO TERRIFIED PRISONERS WERE BROUGHT UP FROM THE CELLS.
THEY ARE HELD IN PLACE BY BIO-MAGNETISM.


THOSE PRISONERS ARE MERELY USEFUL FOR THEIR STRENGTH. MINDS LIKE YOURS AND THE PROFESSOR'S SHOULD BE MUCH MORE USEFUL TO ME. THE CAPTAIN SHALL BE FIRST!
ONCE I'M TRAPPED BY THAT BIO-MAGNETIC COUCH, I'M FINISHED! IT'S NOW OR NEVER!

AS LANCE WAS PUSHED TOWARDS THE CHAIR . . .

. . . HE THREW HIMSELF AT THE GUARDS.

TIME TO JOIN IN.
STOP HIM, YOU FOOLS!

GET SURKON!

SURKON STUMBLED—

YE GODS! HE—HE'S FALLEN UNDER THE MICONLAMP!

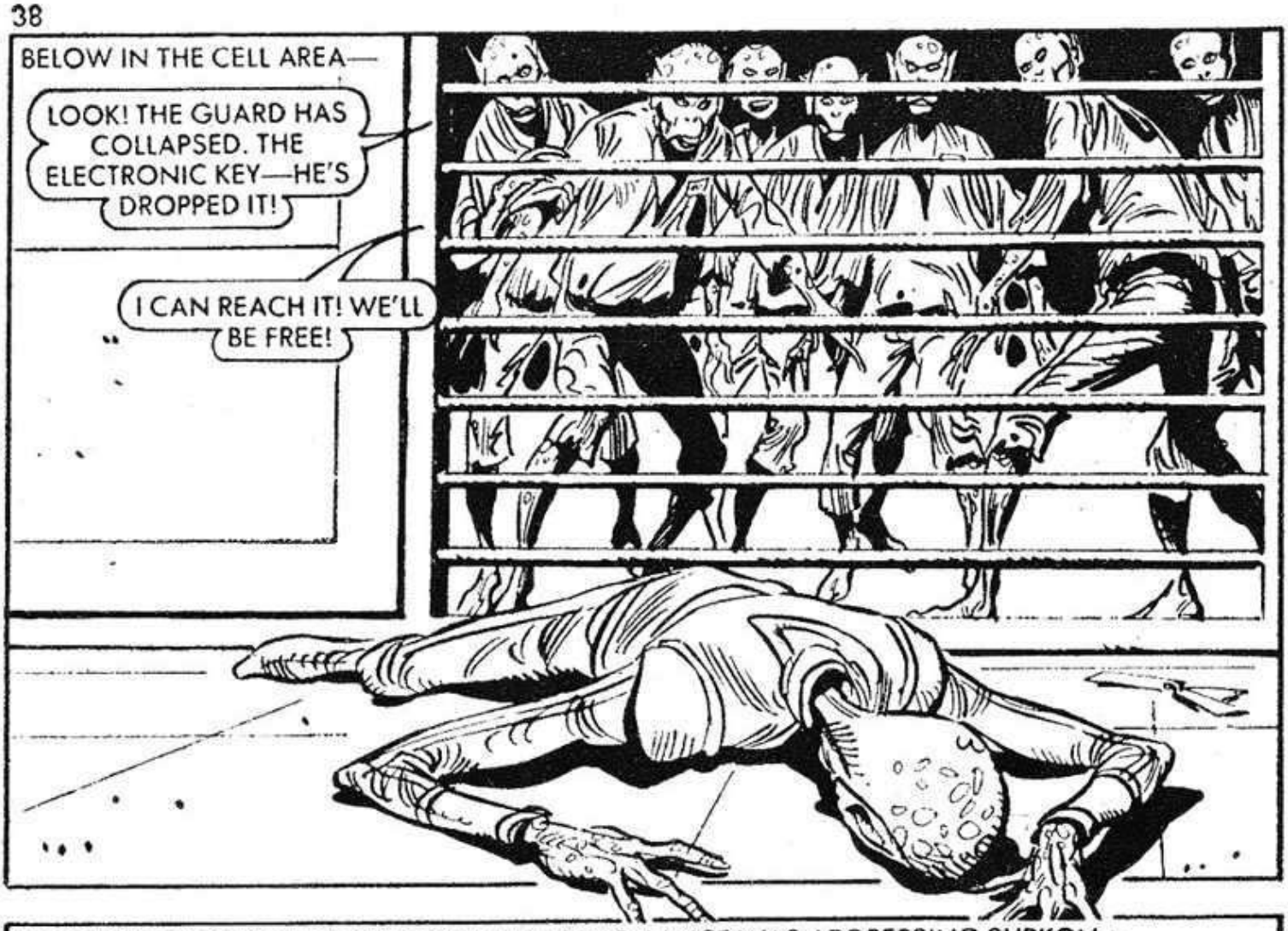
THE CONTROLS!

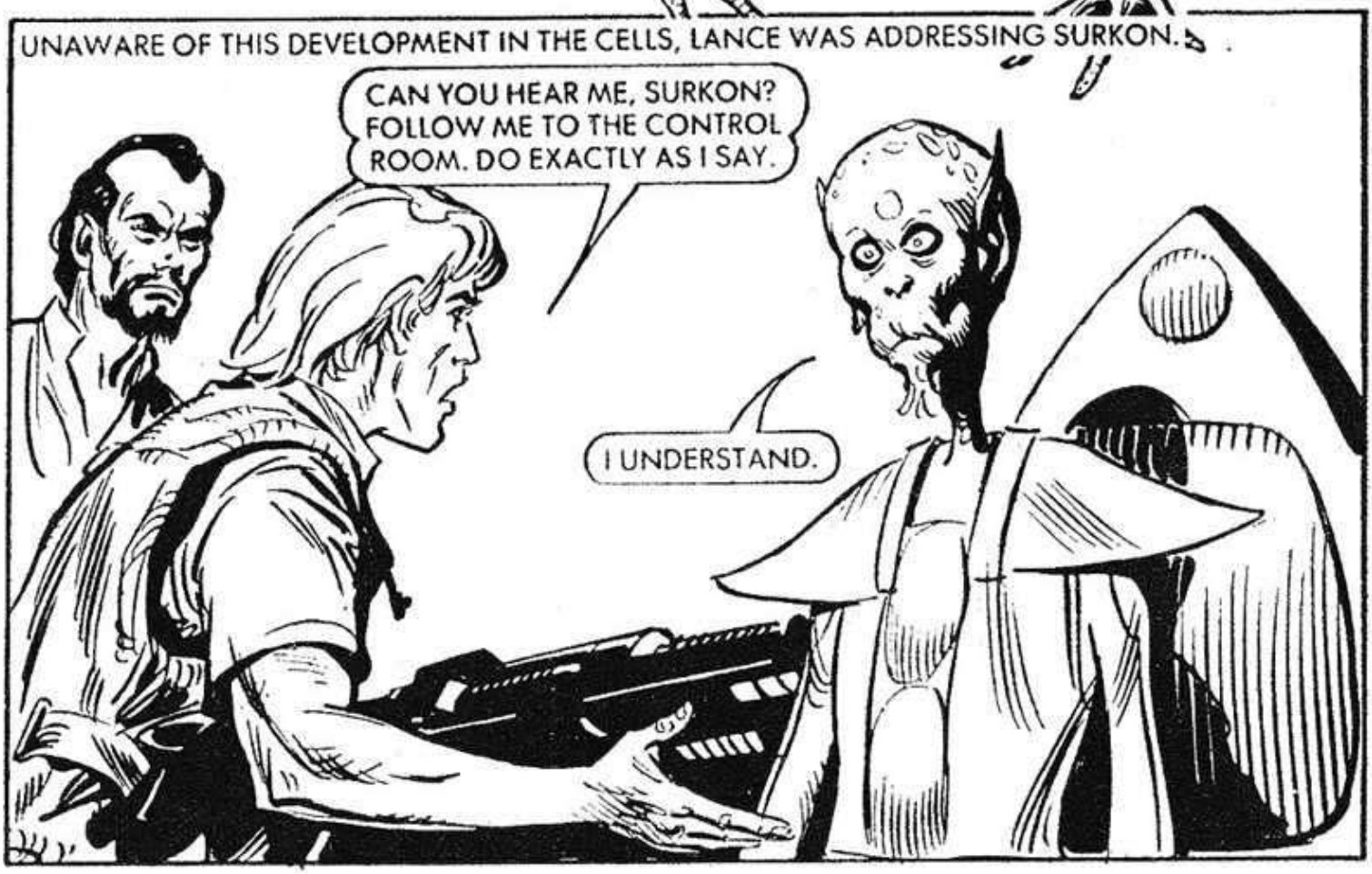
PROFESSOR! HOW DO YOU WORK THIS THING?
NO IDEA, LANCE. IT'S NOT A BINARY CONTROL SYSTEM . . .

A MULTIPLE FEED-BACK AND POWER SYSTEM.
I THINK YOU'RE TOO LATE, PROFESSOR.

THEY'VE ALL COLLAPSED. THAT MUST BE BECAUSE SURKON IS UNCONSCIOUS. HIS MIND WAS CONTROLLING THEIRS. WHEN HE'S OUT---THEY'RE OUT!

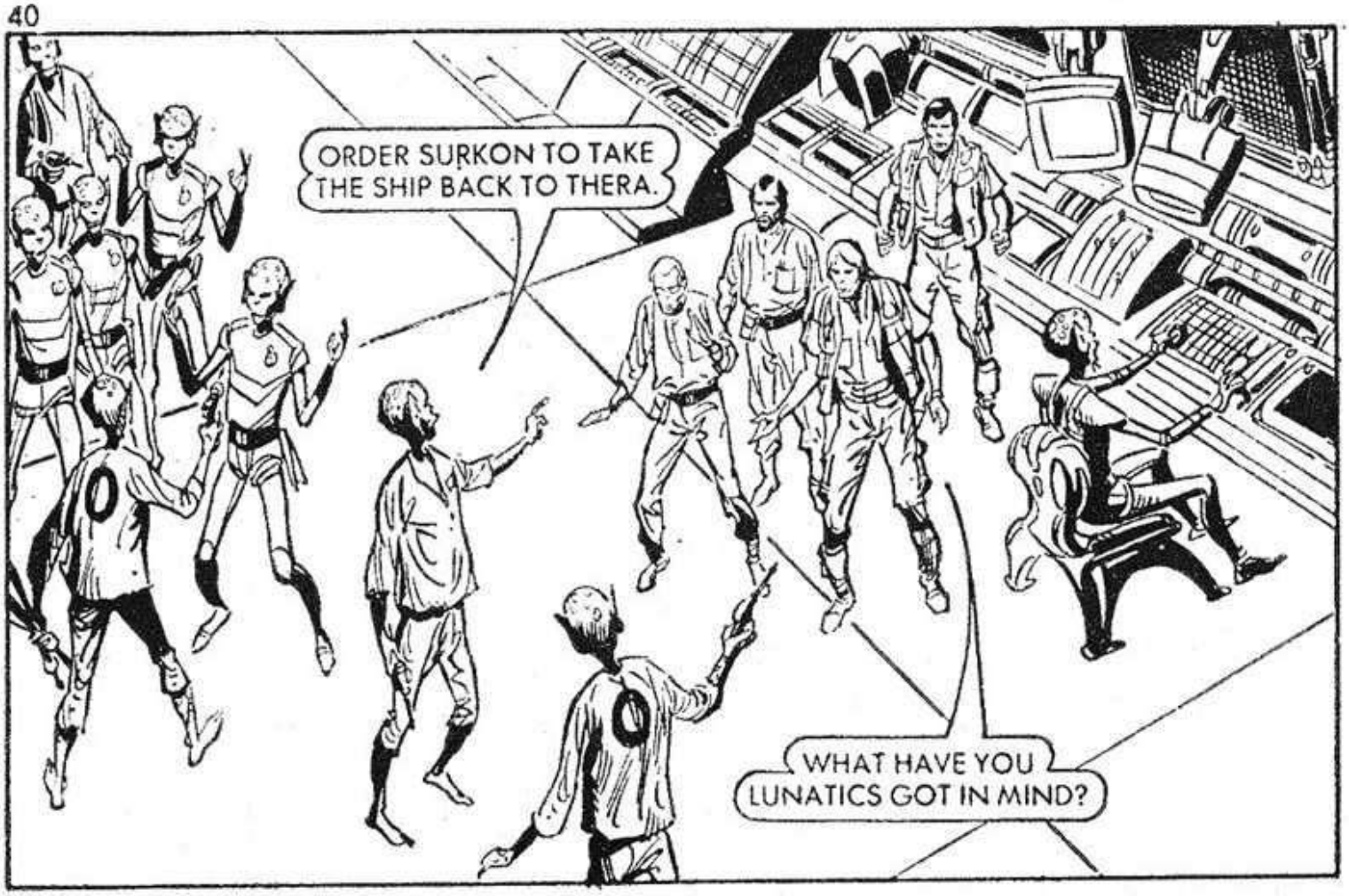
SURKON SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THE VICTIM BEING CONTROLLED BY HIM. IT MUST BE HIS VOICE. SO HE'S A VICTIM . . . IS HE CONTROLLED BY MY VOICE?

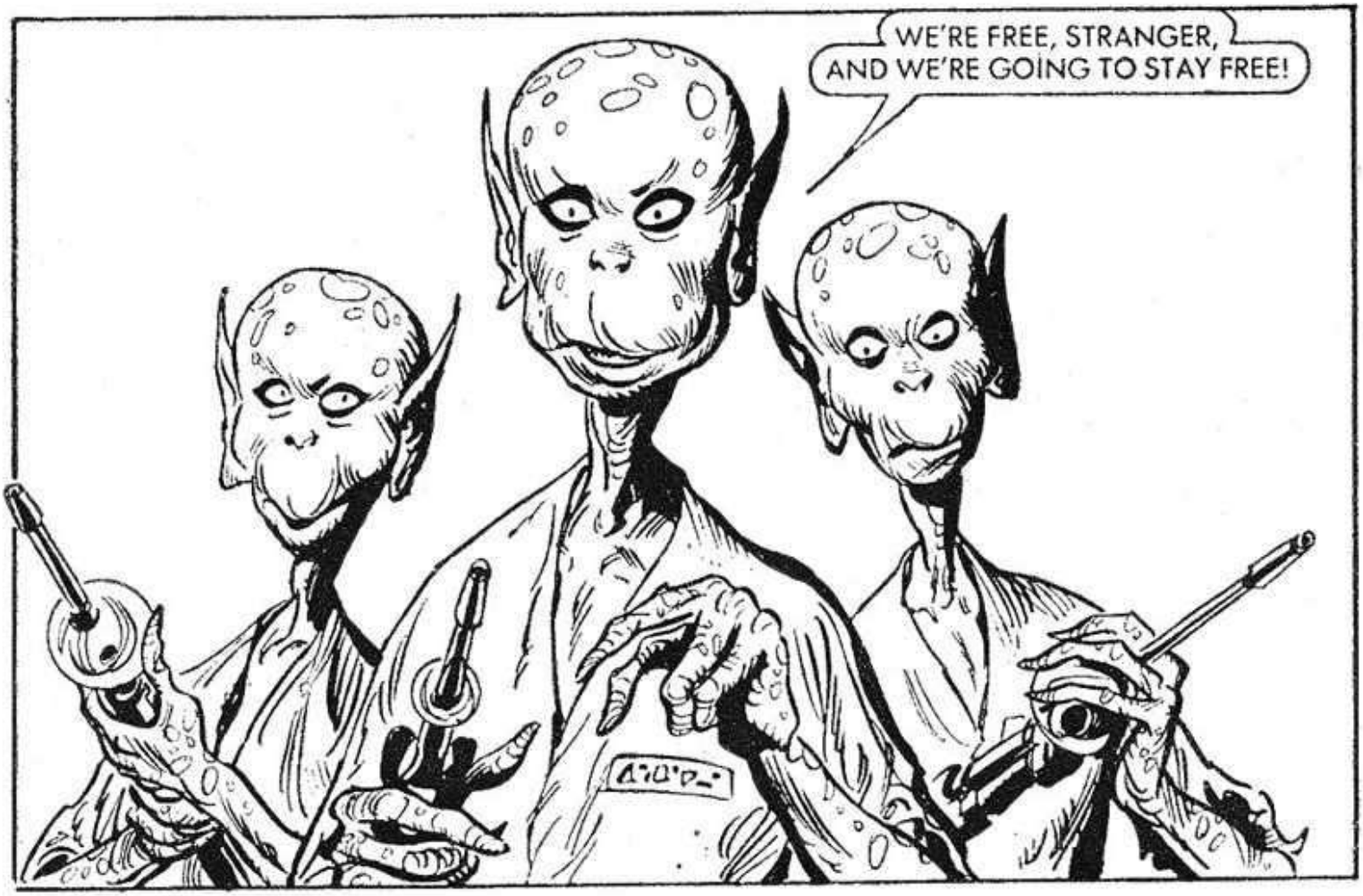

BELOW IN THE CELL AREA—
LOOK! THE GUARD HAS COLLAPSED. THE ELECTRONIC KEY—HE'S DROPPED IT!
I CAN REACH IT! WE'LL BE FREE!


UNAWARE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT IN THE CELLS, LANCE WAS ADDRESSING SURKON.
CAN YOU HEAR ME, SURKON? FOLLOW ME TO THE CONTROL ROOM. DO EXACTLY AS I SAY.
I UNDERSTAND.

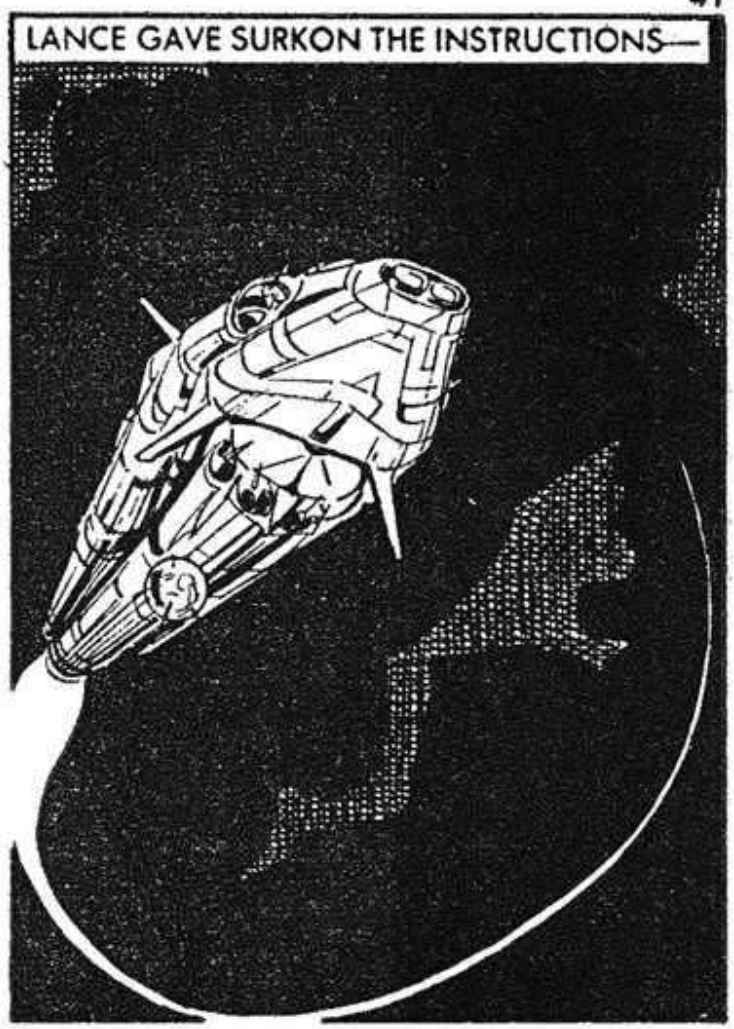
IN THE CONTROL ROOM—
PROGRAMME THE CO-ORDINATES AT WHICH YOU FIRST SAW US . . .
I OBEY.

BUT—
HOLD IT THERE, STRANGER! YOU HAVE CONTROL OF SURKON. CANCEL ALL PREVIOUS INSTRUCTIONS—OR DIE!
THE PRISONERS! HOW IN—? OKAY, SURKON—STOP!


ORDER SURKON TO TAKE THE SHIP BACK TO THERA.
WHAT HAVE YOU LUNATICS GOT IN MIND?


WE'RE FREE, STRANGER, AND WE'RE GOING TO STAY FREE!

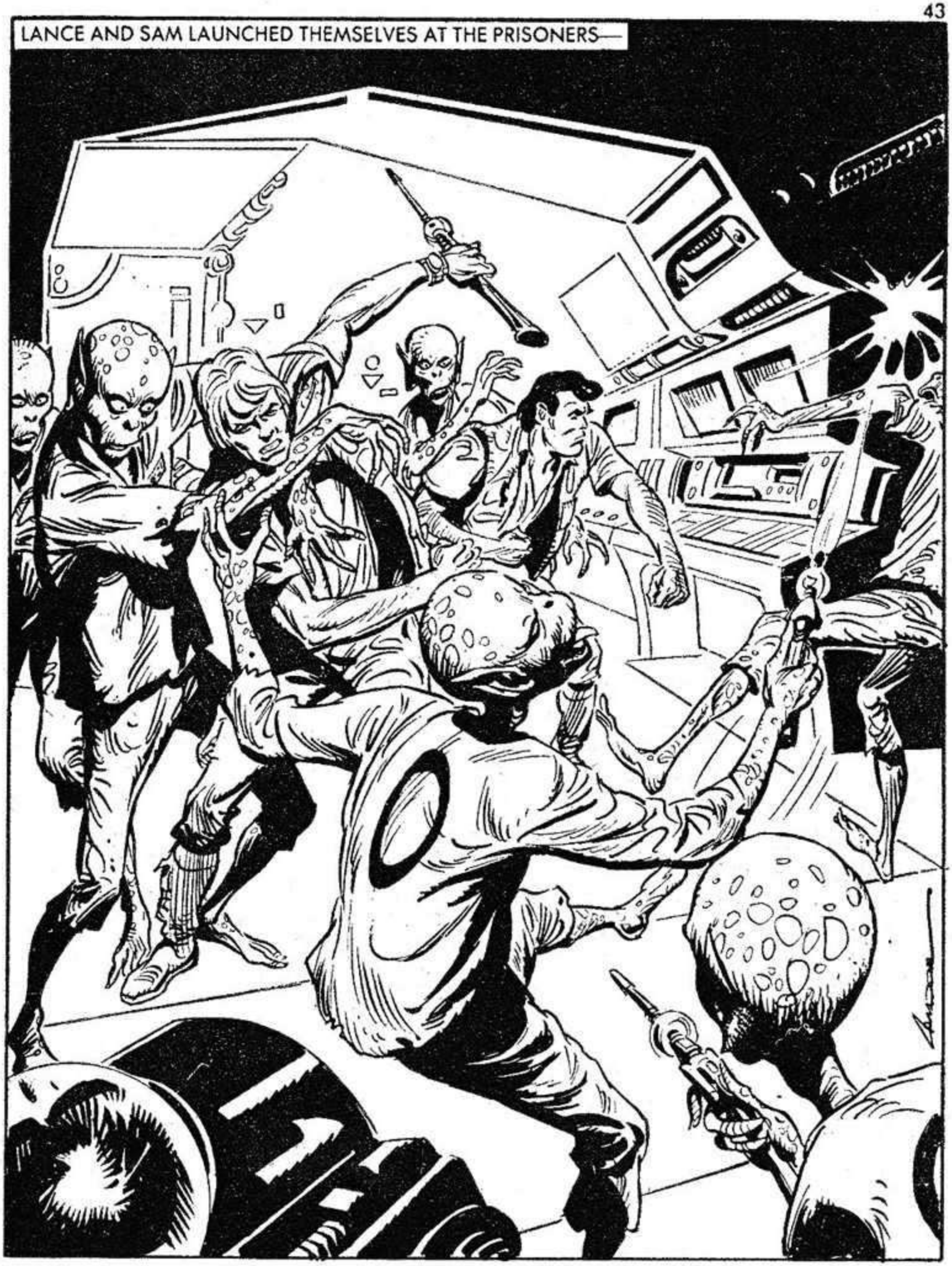
WELL, STRANGER?
I HAVE NO CHOICE.


LANCE GAVE SURKON THE INSTRUCTIONS—

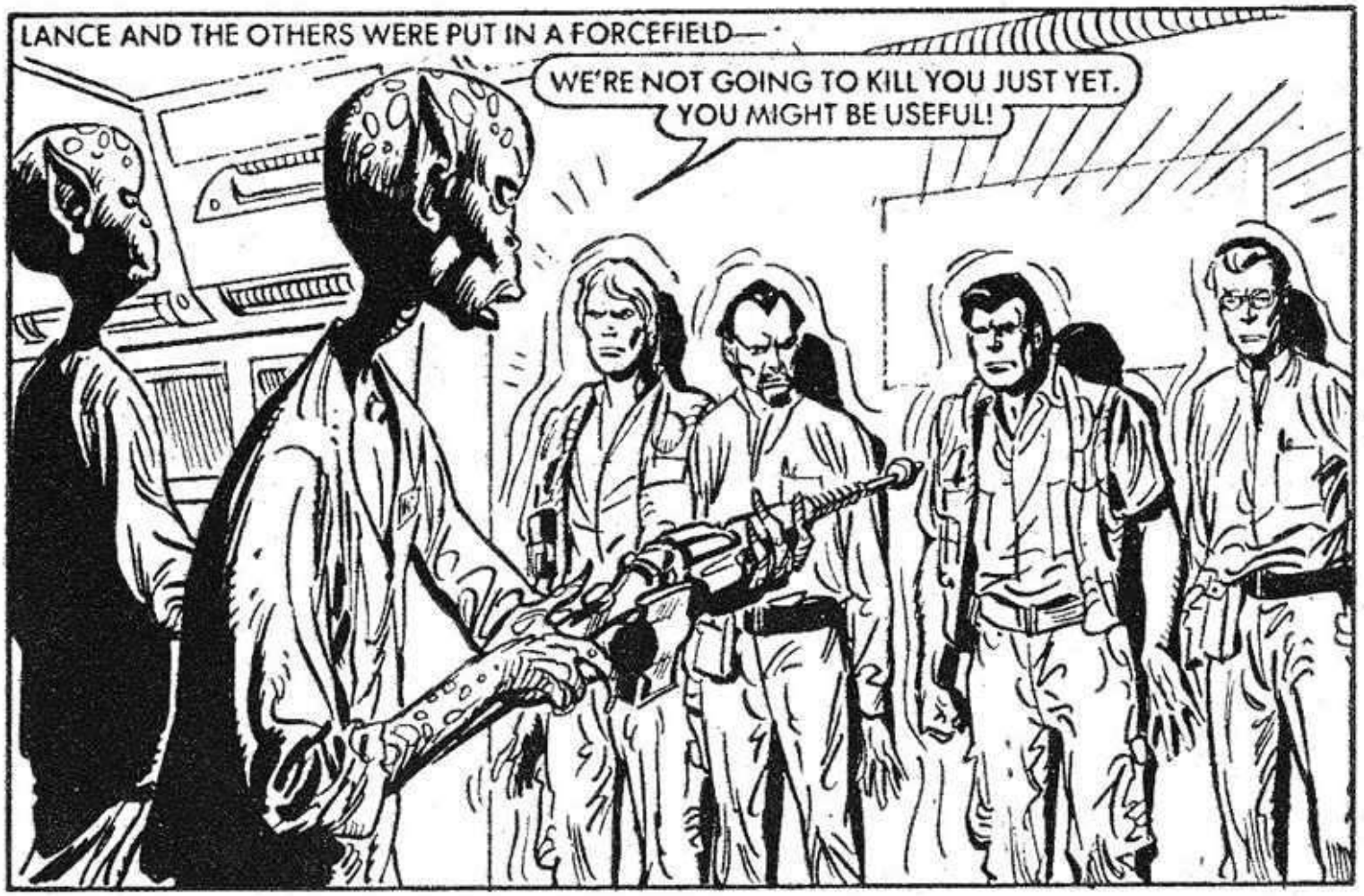
COULD BE A CHANCE HERE, ONCE WE COME OUT OF WARP SPEED.

LANCE AND SAM RECOVERED FROM THE EFFECTS OF SPACE ACCELERATION MORE QUICKLY THAN THE REST.

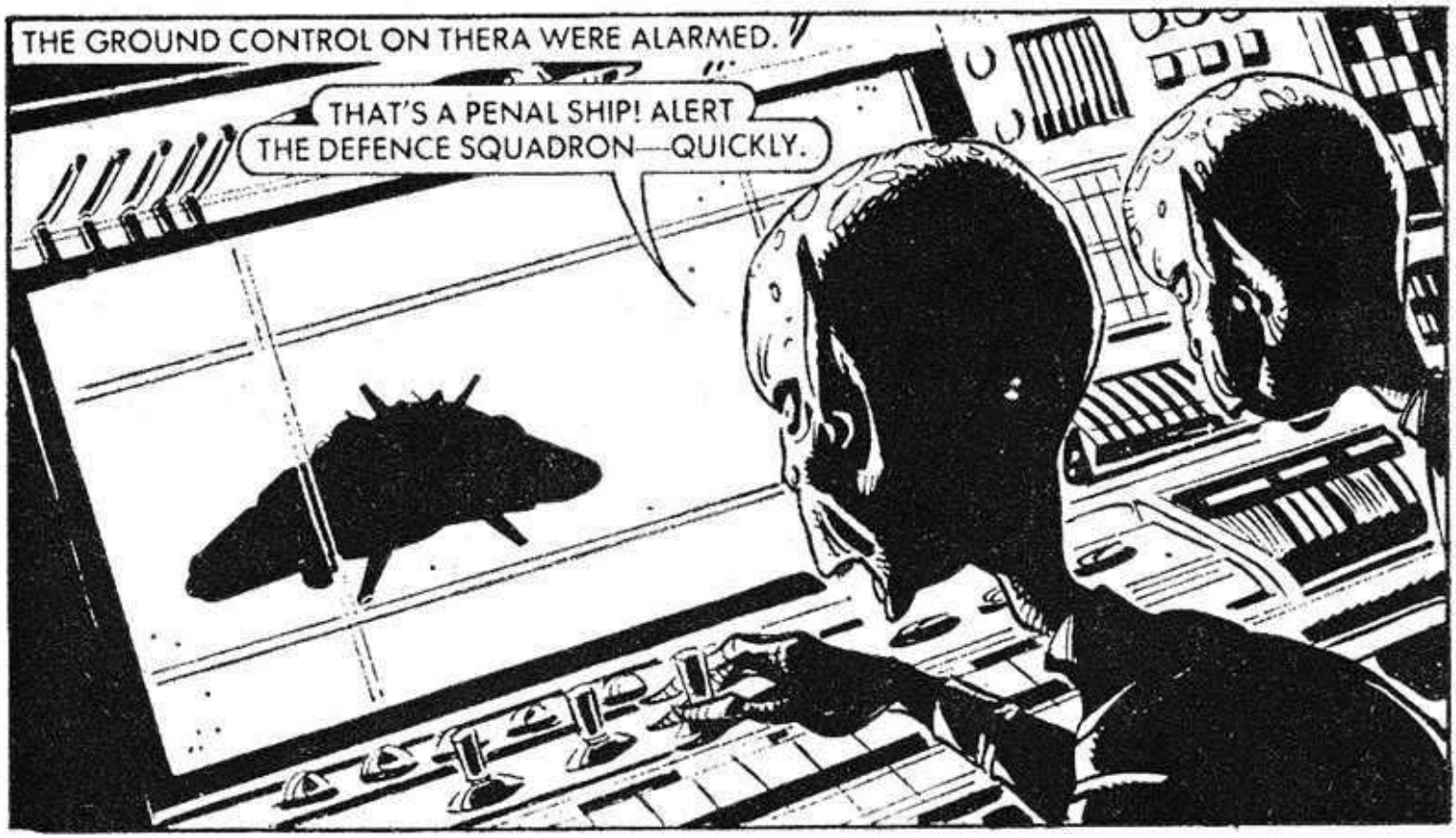
I'M WITH YOU, LANCE.


LANCE AND SAM LAUNCHED THEMSELVES AT THE PRISONERS—

BUT THE ODDS WERE TOO GREAT.


LANCE AND THE OTHERS WERE PUT IN A FORCEFIELD—
WE'RE NOT GOING TO KILL YOU JUST YET. YOU MIGHT BE USEFUL!

THE PENAL SHIP SWEPT OVER THE THERAN CAPITAL.
SELECT TARGETS . . . SAFETY SWITCHES OFF . . .


THE GROUND CONTROL ON THERA WERE ALARMED.
THAT'S A PENAL SHIP! ALERT THE DEFENCE SQUADRON—QUICKLY.

FIRE!

THEY'RE ATTACKING! ALERT! ALERT! ACTIVATE CIVILIAN ALARMS AND MOBILISE DEFENCE SQUADRON— ALERT! ALERT!

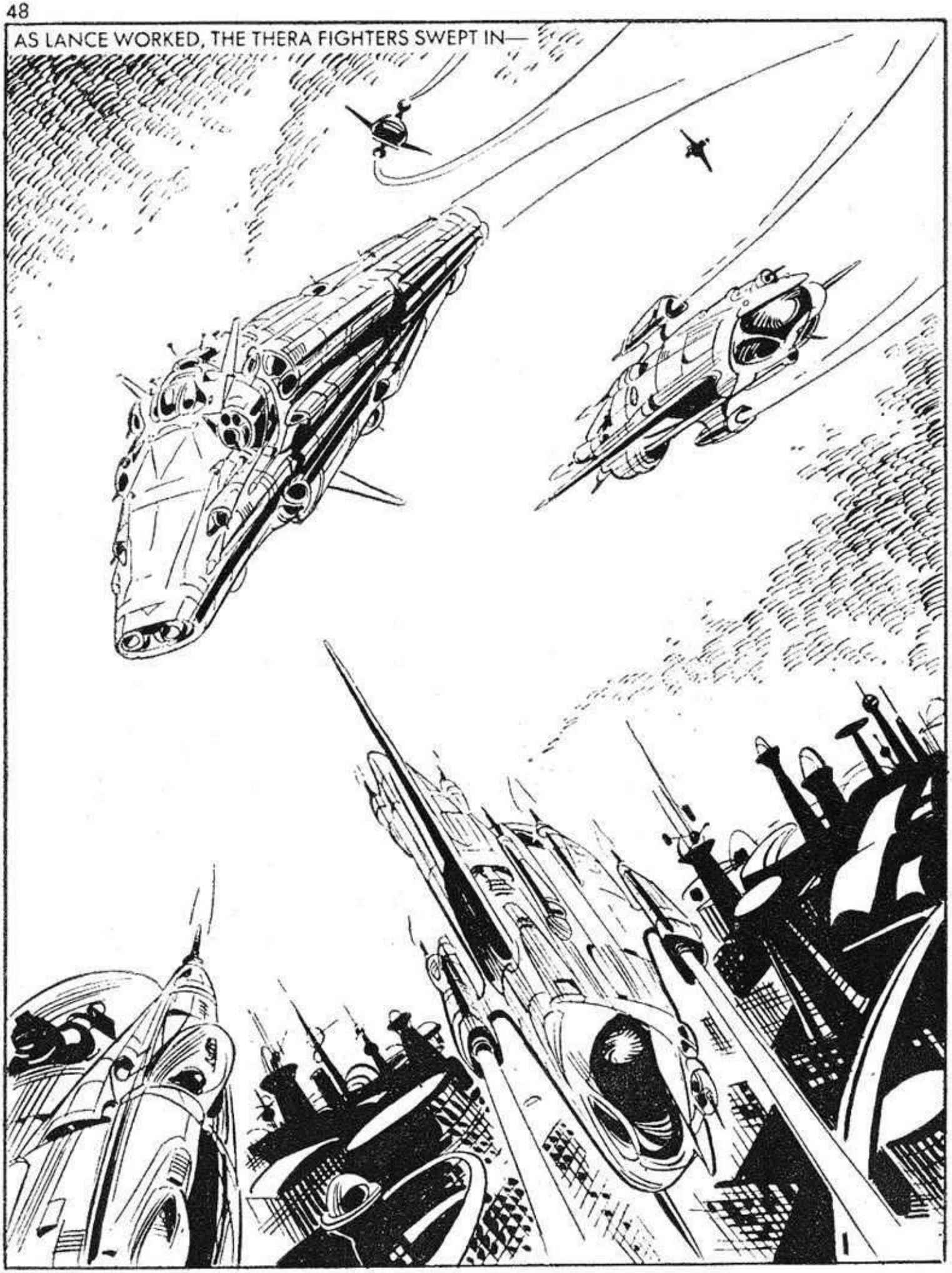
HERE COMES THE DEFENCE SQUADRON. FORCESHIELD ON REPULSE.

THEY'VE SHACKLED US WITH A FORCEFIELD. THAT'S UNBREAKABLE . . . UNLESS . . .

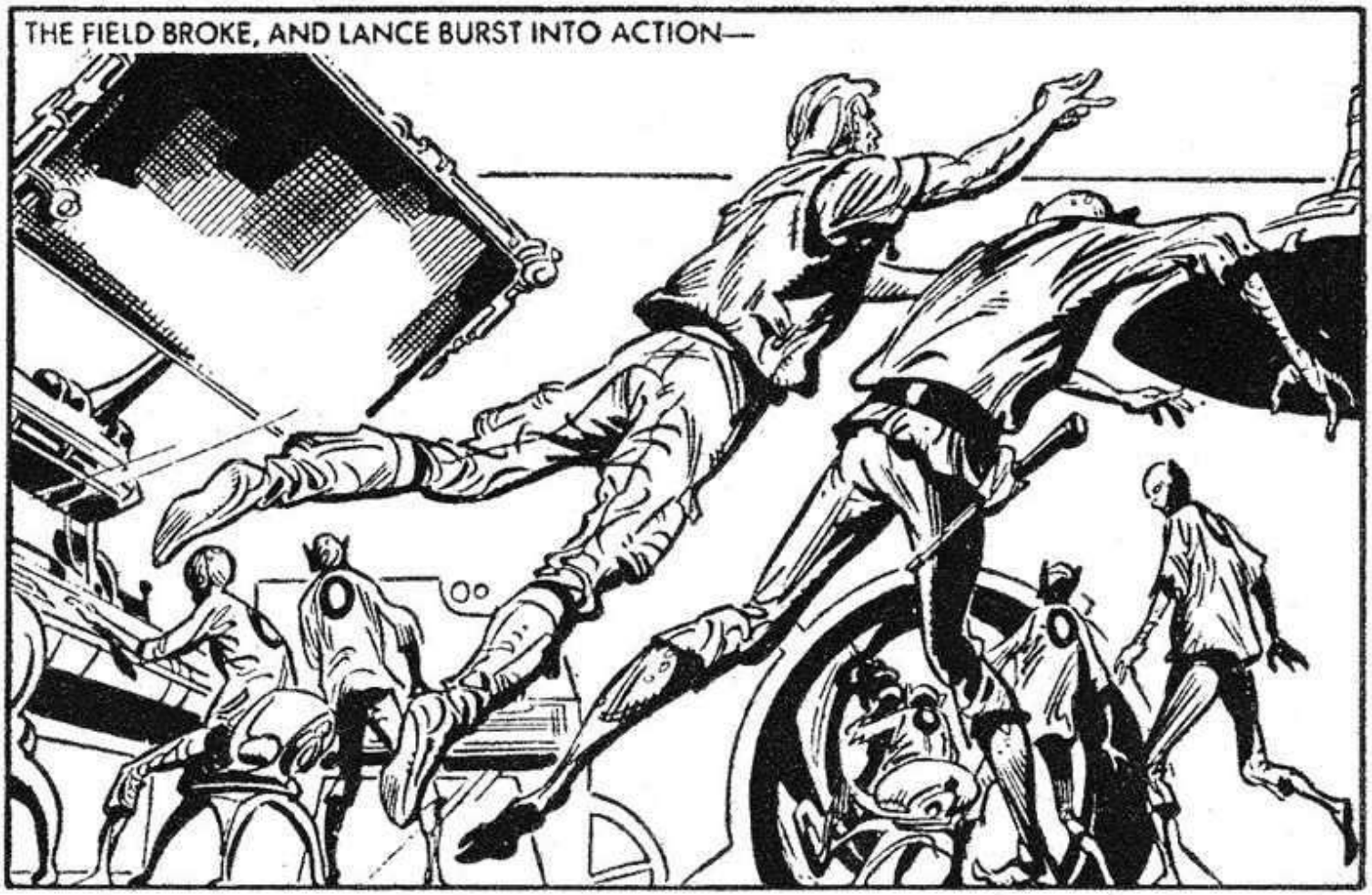
AS THE PENAL SHIP BANKED TO RENEW ITS ATTACK ON THE CITY —

A SHORT CIRCUIT—THAT SHOULD DO THE TRICK!

THEY'RE NOT PAYING MUCH ATTENTION TO US. IF I CAN CAUSE A SHORT CIRCUIT, THE COMPUTER WILL BE FORCED TO SHUT DOWN FOR A SECOND TO FIND AND RECTIFY THE FAULT . . .


AS LANCE WORKED, THE THERA FIGHTERS SWEPT IN—

IF I CAN GRAB ONE OF THEIR WEAPONS, I MIGHT STAND SOME SORT OF A CHANCE . . . THE FIELD'S DOWN.

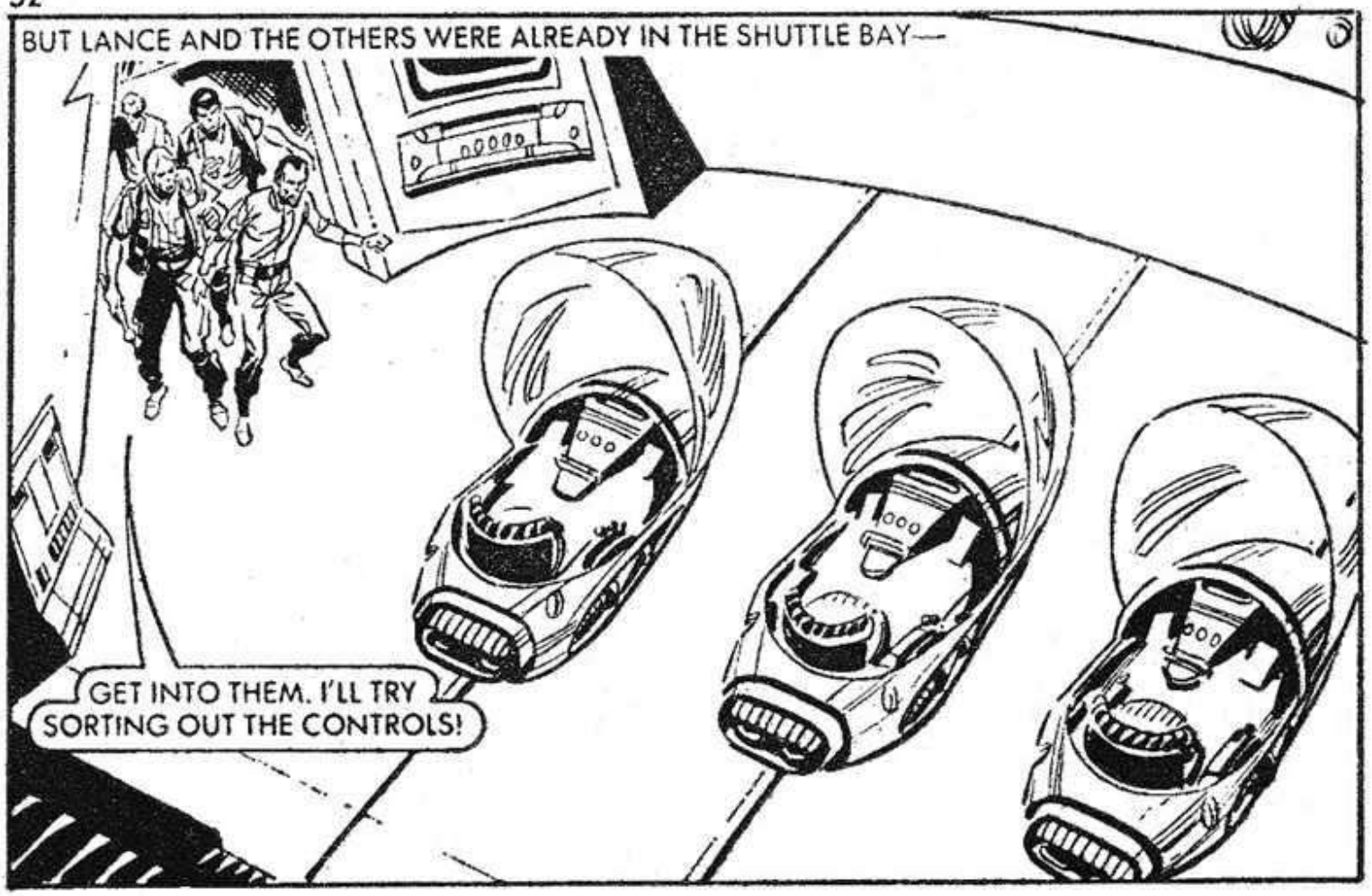

THE FIELD BROKE, AND LANCE BURST INTO ACTION—

GET THAT STRANGER!

I'D BETTER RELEASE THE OTHERS.

HOLD TIGHT! I'M PULLING OUT OF HERE! GET THAT FIRE OUT!
TIME TO GO, PROFESSOR. THERE MUST BE SOME SORT OF EMERGENCY ESCAPE SYSTEM ON THIS SHIP. HELP ME RELEASE THE OTHERS AND WE'LL GO LOOK FOR IT!

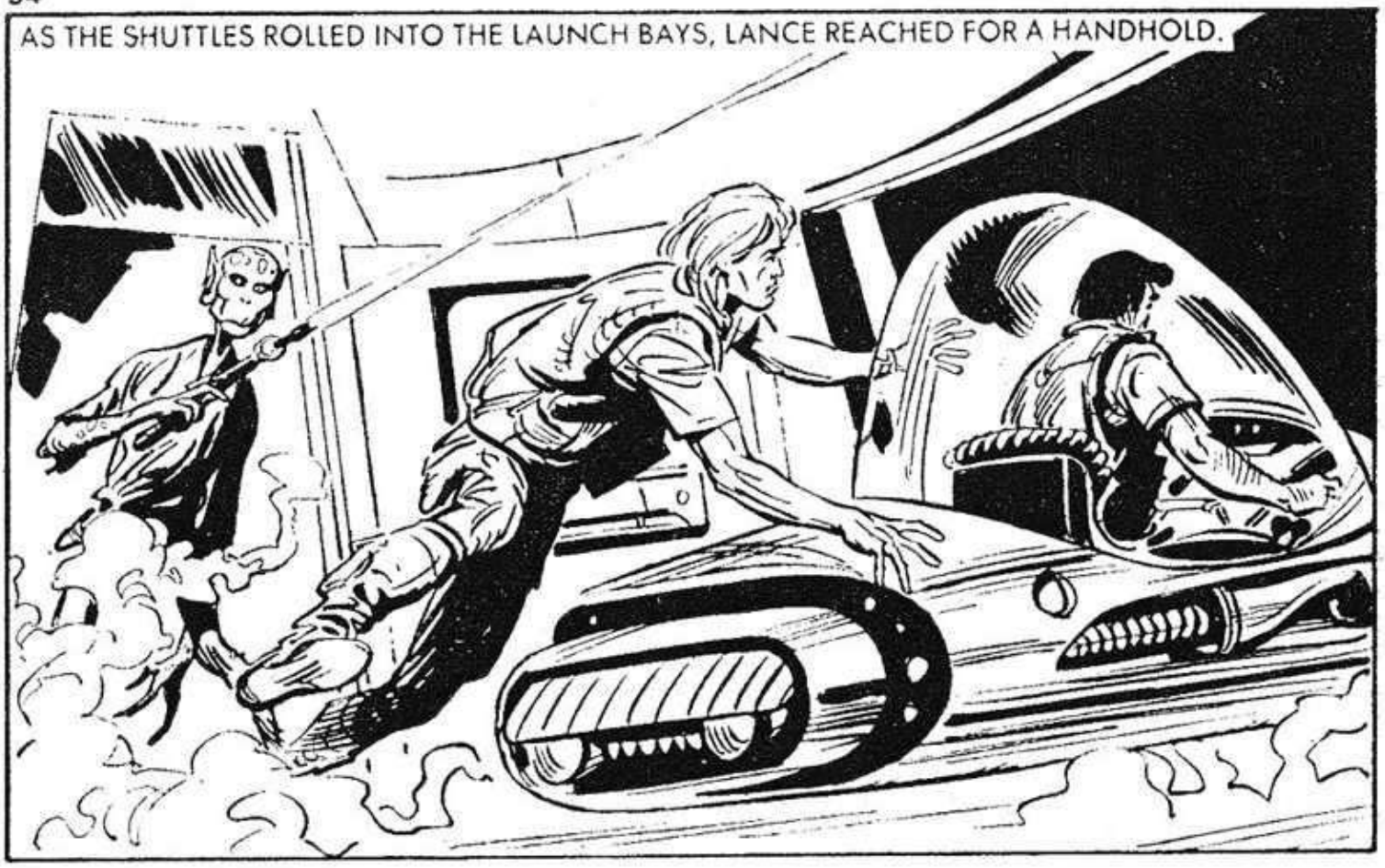
TALMAN! KEEP HER ON AUTOMATIC— I'M GOING AFTER THOSE STRANGERS!


BUT LANCE AND THE OTHERS WERE ALREADY IN THE SHUTTLE BAY—
GET INTO THEM. I'LL TRY SORTING OUT THE CONTROLS!

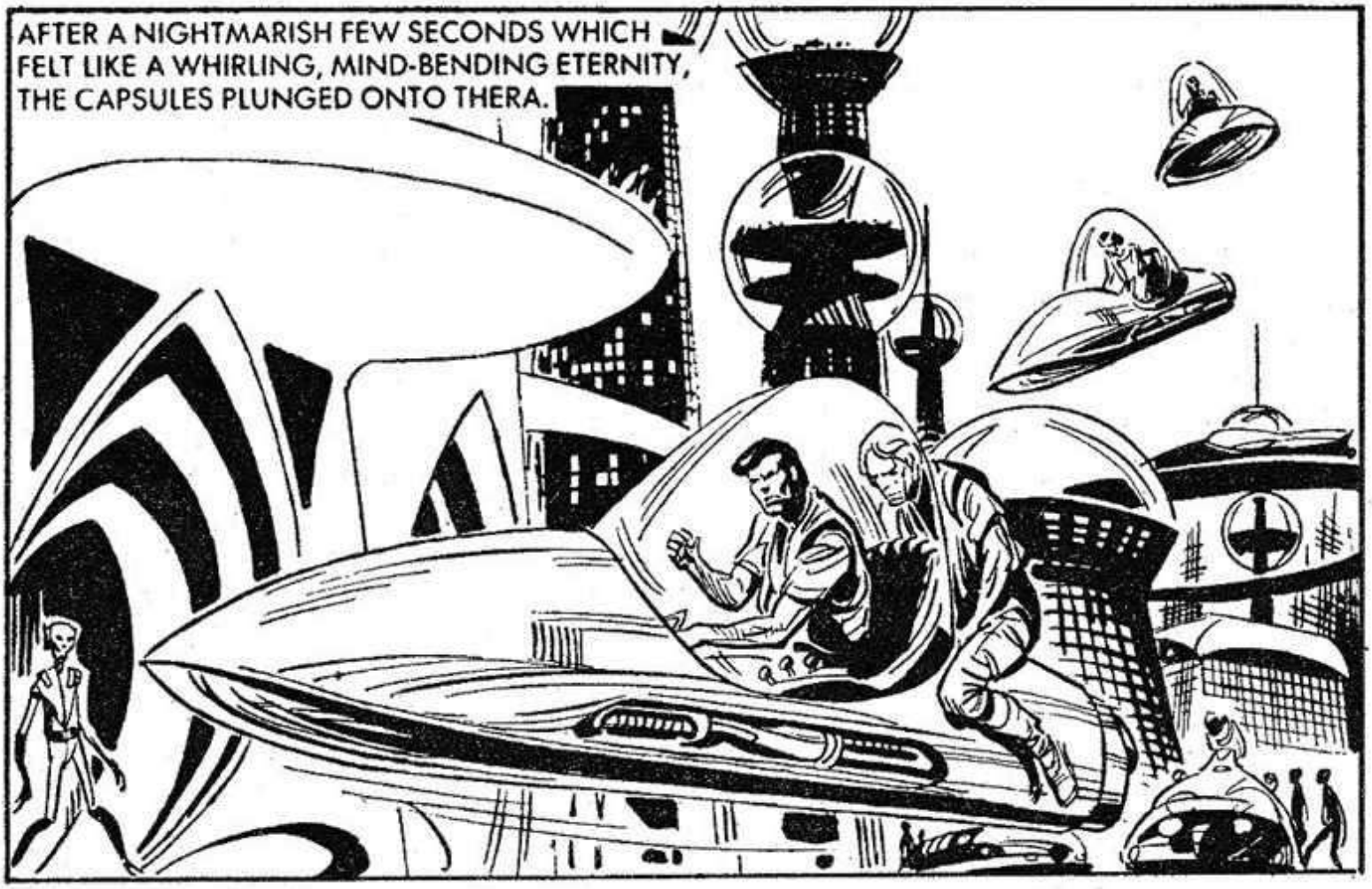
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU, LANCE? YOU CAN'T STAY HERE!
I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES, SAM.

IT'S A STANDARD COMPUTER BANK . . . THEY SHOULD BE EJECTED SAFELY IN THOSE CAPSULES.

OKAY! HOLD IT!
AFRAID YOU'RE JUST TOO LATE.


AS THE SHUTTLES ROLLED INTO THE LAUNCH BAYS, LANCE REACHED FOR A HANDHOLD.

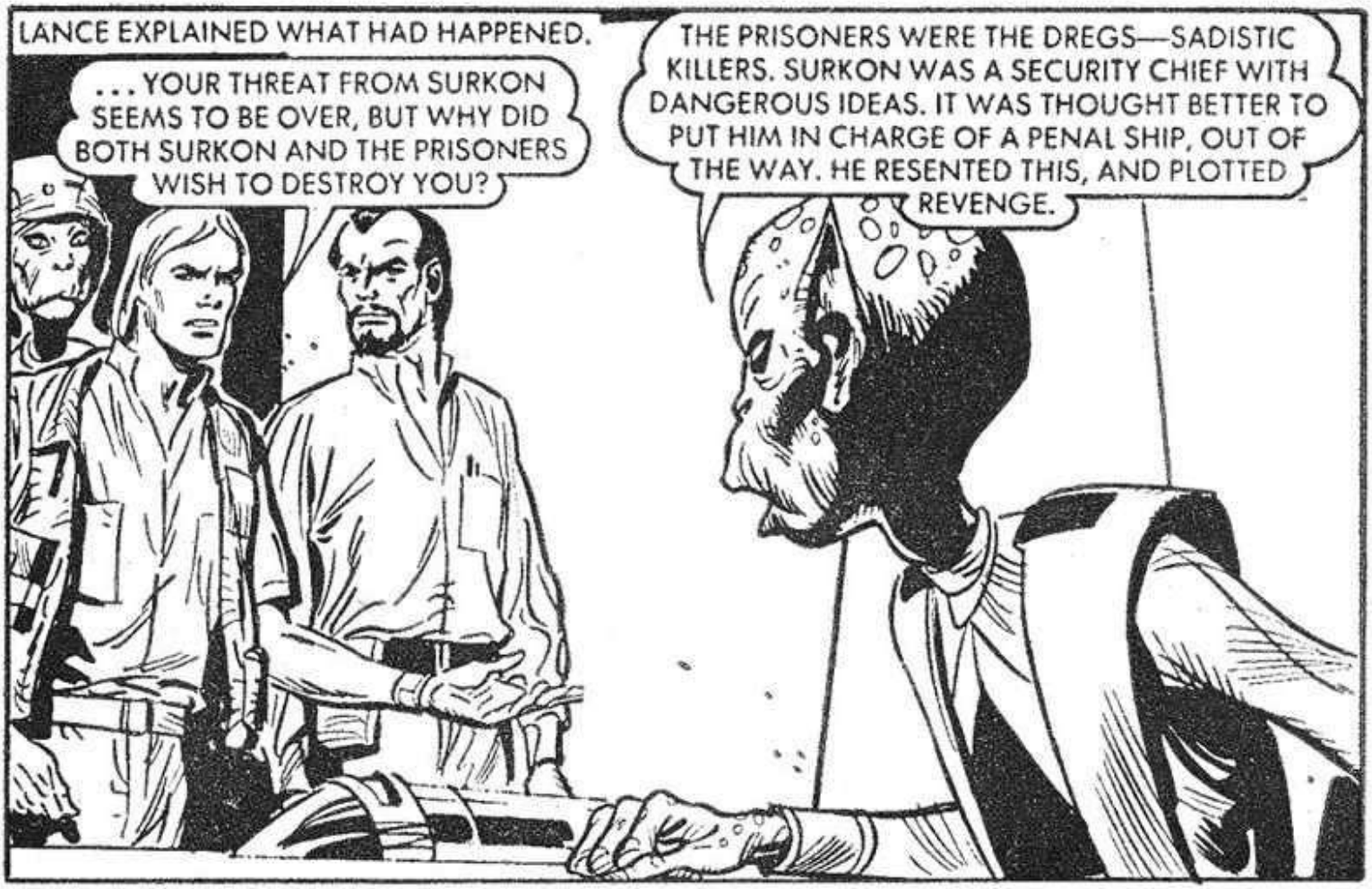
THE STRANGERS HAVE ESCAPED.

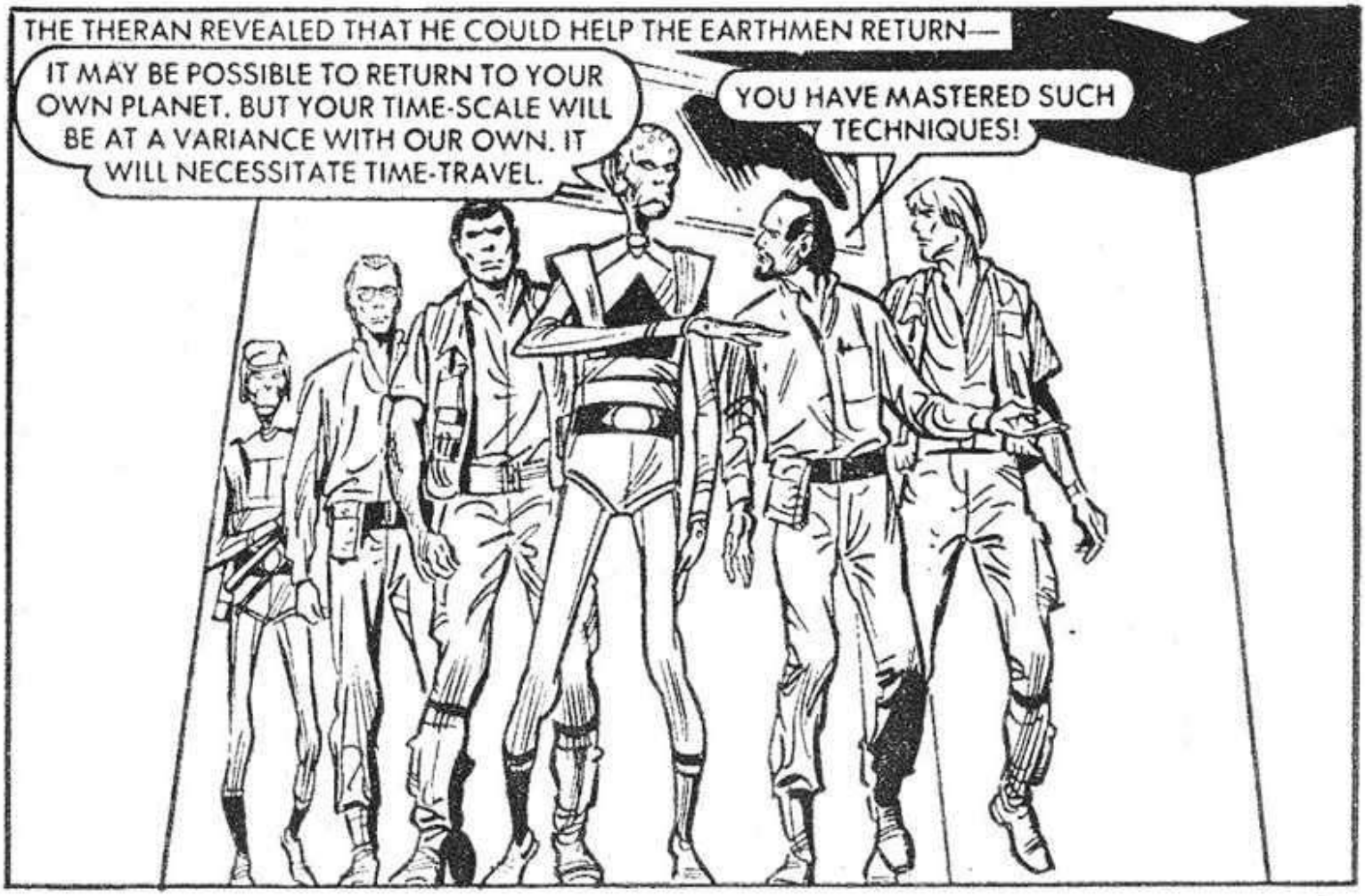

AFTER A NIGHTMARISH FEW SECONDS WHICH FELT LIKE A WHIRLING, MIND-BENDING ETERNITY, THE CAPSULES PLUNGED ONTO THERA.

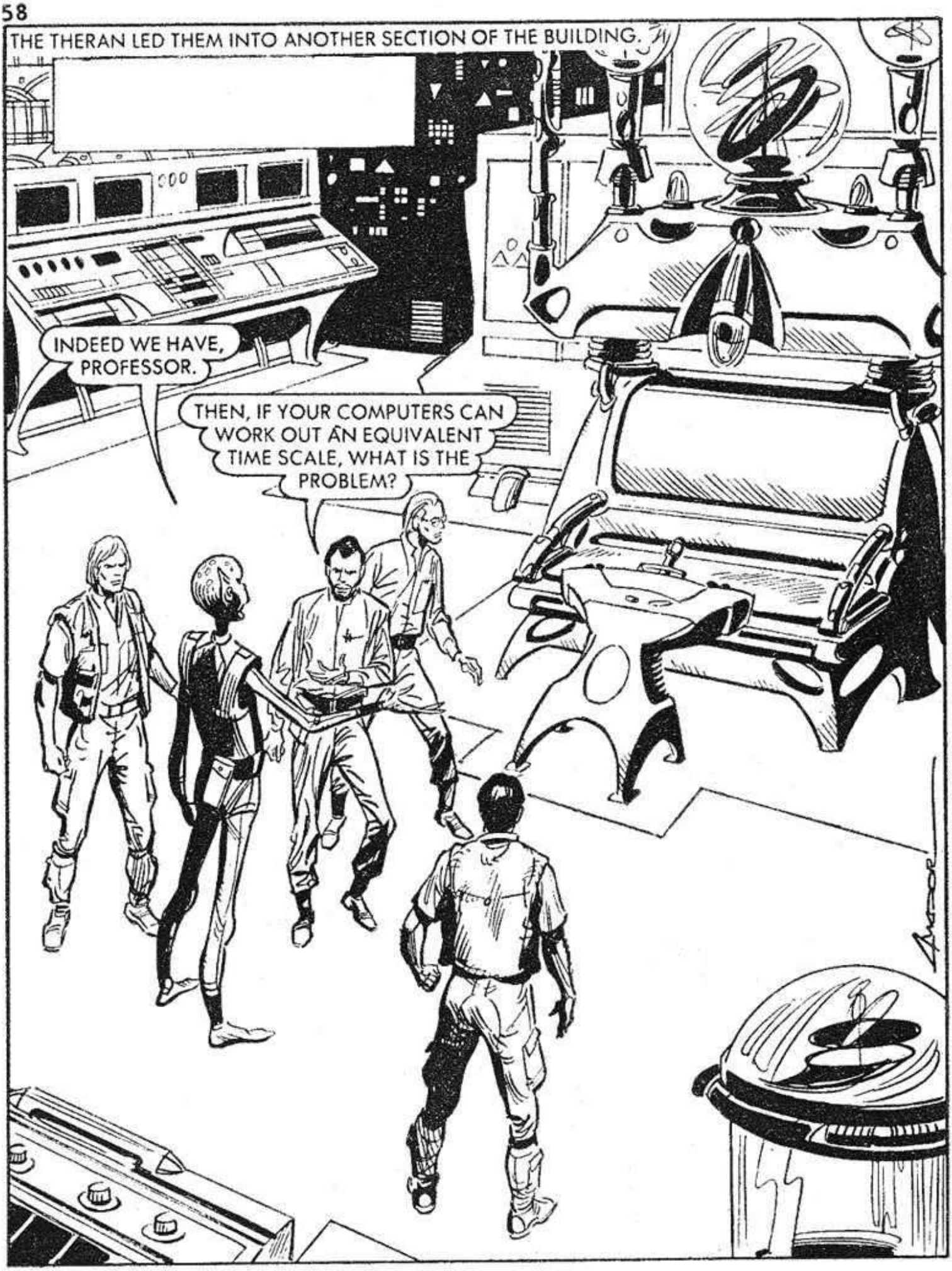
MAKE NO MOVES . . . OR YOU FRY!

THEY WERE TAKEN TO THE THERAN SECURITY BUILDING.

WE HAVE JUST ESCAPED FROM THAT PENAL SHIP OF YOURS.
SO IT WOULD SEEM. IT JUST EXPLODED OUTSIDE THE CITY. WHO ARE YOU? HOW DID YOU COME TO BE ABOARD?


LANCE EXPLAINED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
. . . YOUR THREAT FROM SURKON SEEMS TO BE OVER, BUT WHY DID BOTH SURKON AND THE PRISONERS WISH TO DESTROY YOU?
THE PRISONERS WERE THE DREGS—SADISTIC KILLERS. SURKON WAS A SECURITY CHIEF WITH DANGEROUS IDEAS. IT WAS THOUGHT BETTER TO PUT HIM IN CHARGE OF A PENAL SHIP, OUT OF THE WAY. HE RESENTED THIS, AND PLOTTED REVENGE.


THE THERAN REVEALED THAT HE COULD HELP THE EARTHMEN RETURN—
IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO RETURN TO YOUR OWN PLANET. BUT YOUR TIME-SCALE WILL BE AT A VARIANCE WITH OUR OWN. IT WILL NECESSITATE TIME-TRAVEL.
YOU HAVE MASTERED SUCH TECHNIQUES!


THE THERAN LED THEM INTO ANOTHER SECTION OF THE BUILDING.
INDEED WE HAVE, PROFESSOR.
THEN, IF YOUR COMPUTERS CAN WORK OUT AN EQUIVALENT TIME SCALE, WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

YOU CAN RETURN TO A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE DISASTER OCCURRED ON YOU SATELLITE. THAT IS ALL WE CAN DO. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT TIME CANNOT BE ALTERED . . . BECAUSE ALL MEMORY OF THESE EVENTS WILL BE ERASED.

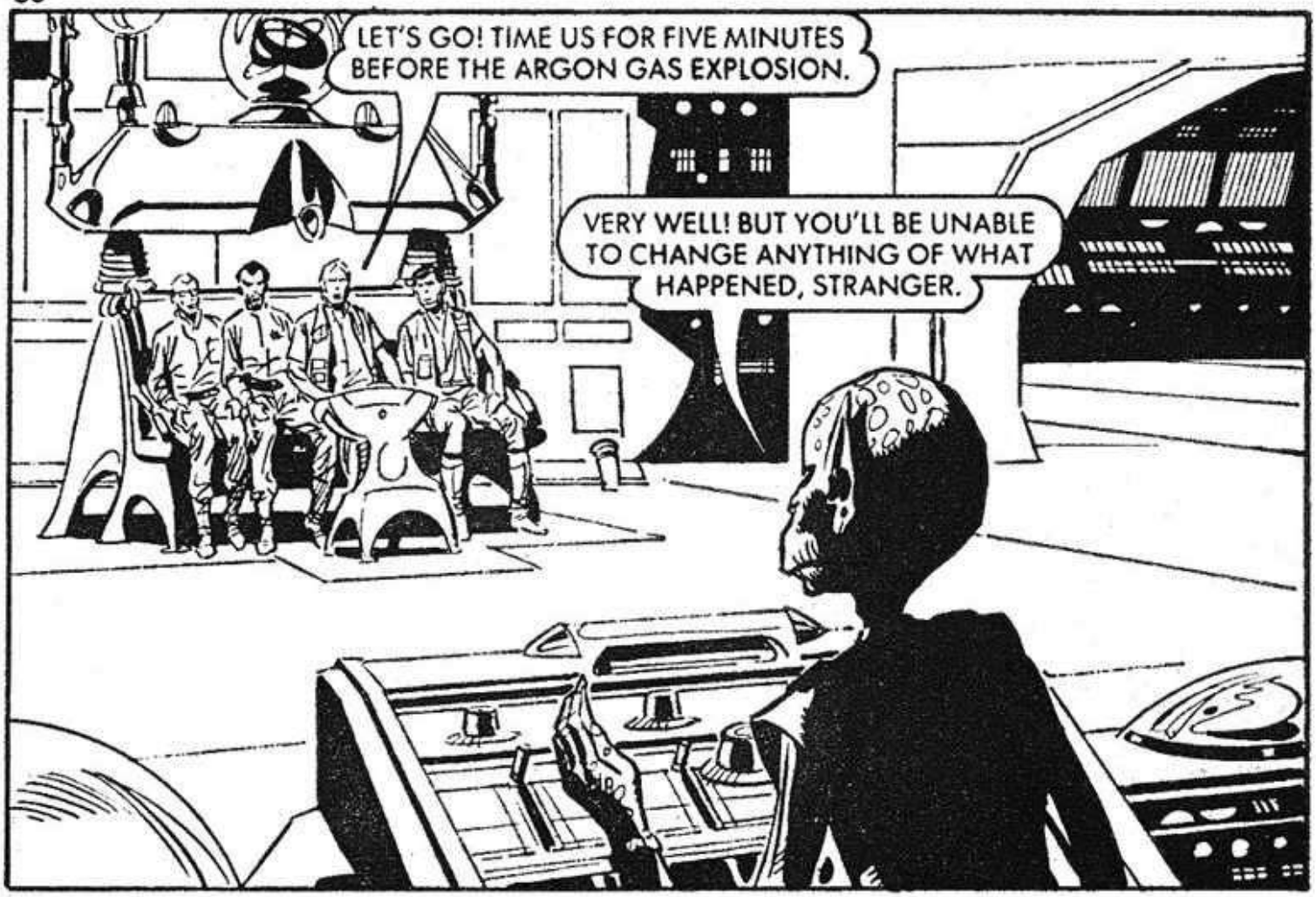
THAT MEANS WE'RE TRAPPED FOREVER, BECAUSE WE CAN'T STOP THE EXPLOSION. THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WILL REPEAT THEMSELVES ENDLESSLY.

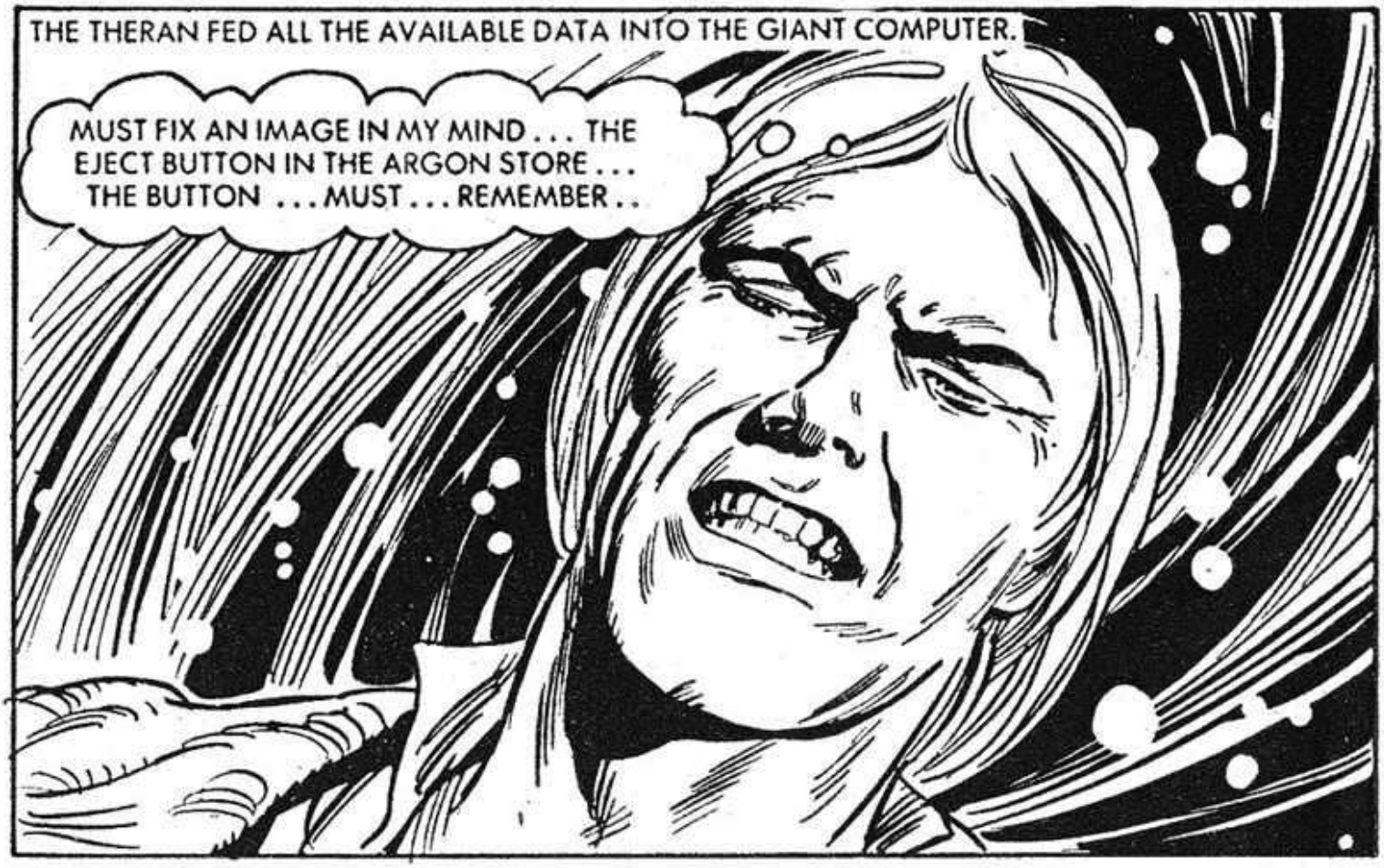
NOT REALLY! THE NEXT TIME THE EXPLOSION OCCURS YOU WILL BE BLASTED INTO THE SAME SECTOR OF HYPER SPACE, BUT IT WILL NOT BE THERA YOU VISIT. OUR TIME SCALE IS NOT ALTERED, SO WE WILL HAVE ADVANCED IN RELATION TO PRESENT LEVELS OF TECHNOLOGY—WHO KNOWS WHAT LIES IN WAIT?

WE CAN STAY HERE AND LIVE OR GO BACK.

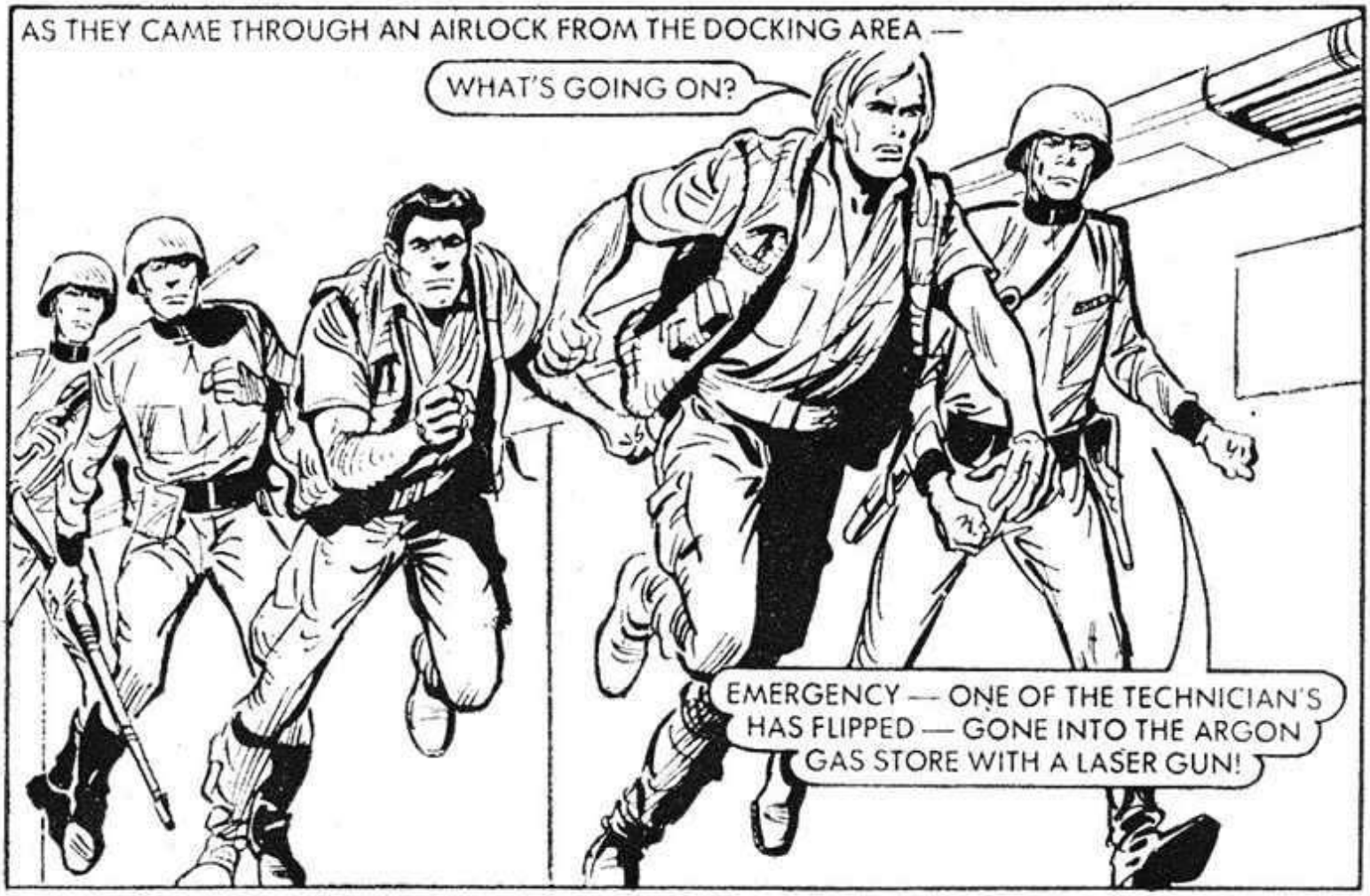
I'M FOR GOING BACK!

ME TOO. WE'VE GOT TO TAKE THE CHANCE.

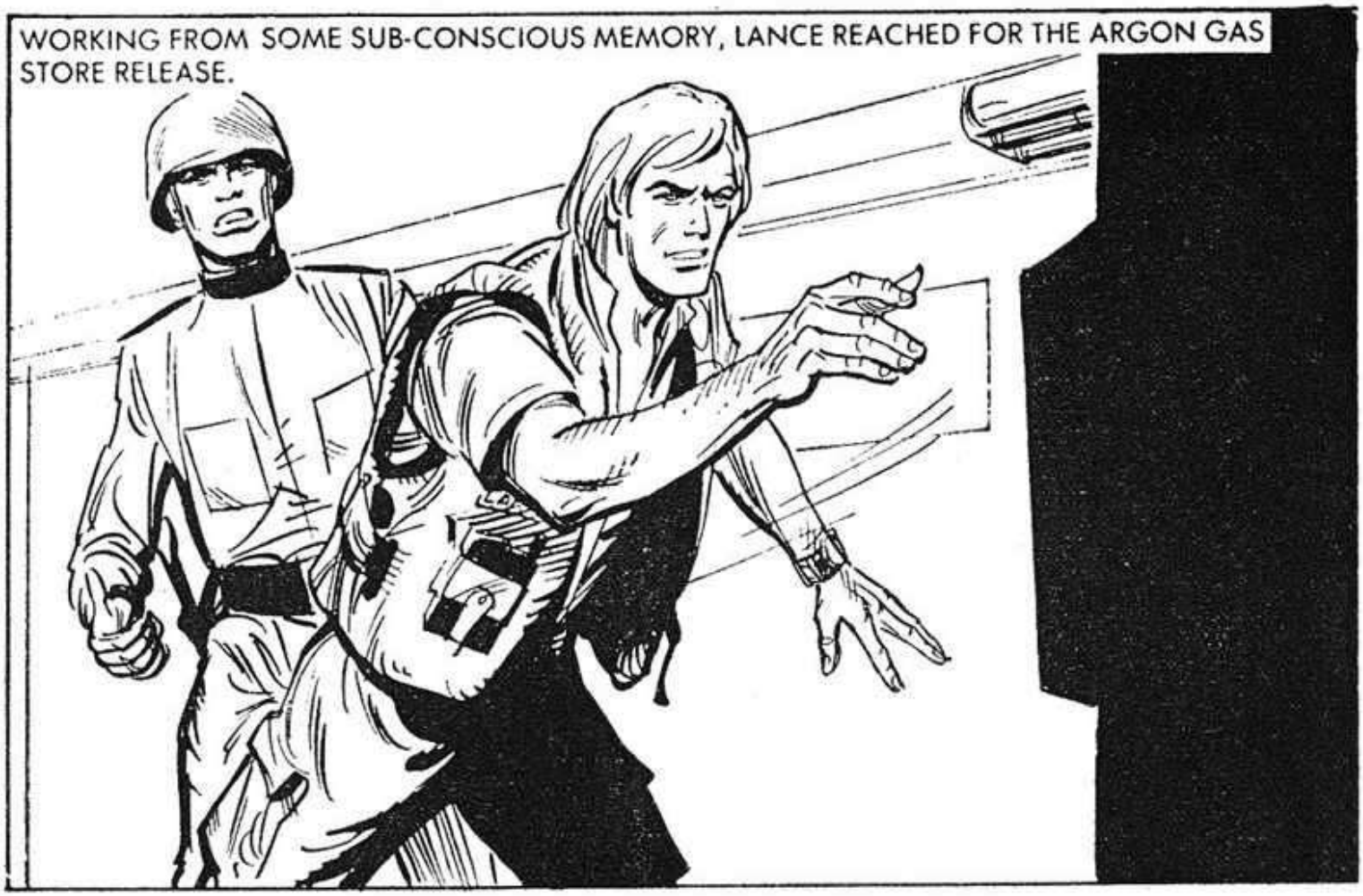

LET'S GO! TIME US FOR FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THE ARGON GAS EXPLOSION.
VERY WELL! BUT YOU'LL BE UNABLE TO CHANGE ANYTHING OF WHAT HAPPENED, STRANGER.


THE THERAN FED ALL THE AVAILABLE DATA INTO THE GIANT COMPUTER.
MUST FIX AN IMAGE IN MY MIND . . . THE EJECT BUTTON IN THE ARGON STORE . . . THE BUTTON . . . MUST . . . REMEMBER . .

TAKE HER IN SLOWLY!

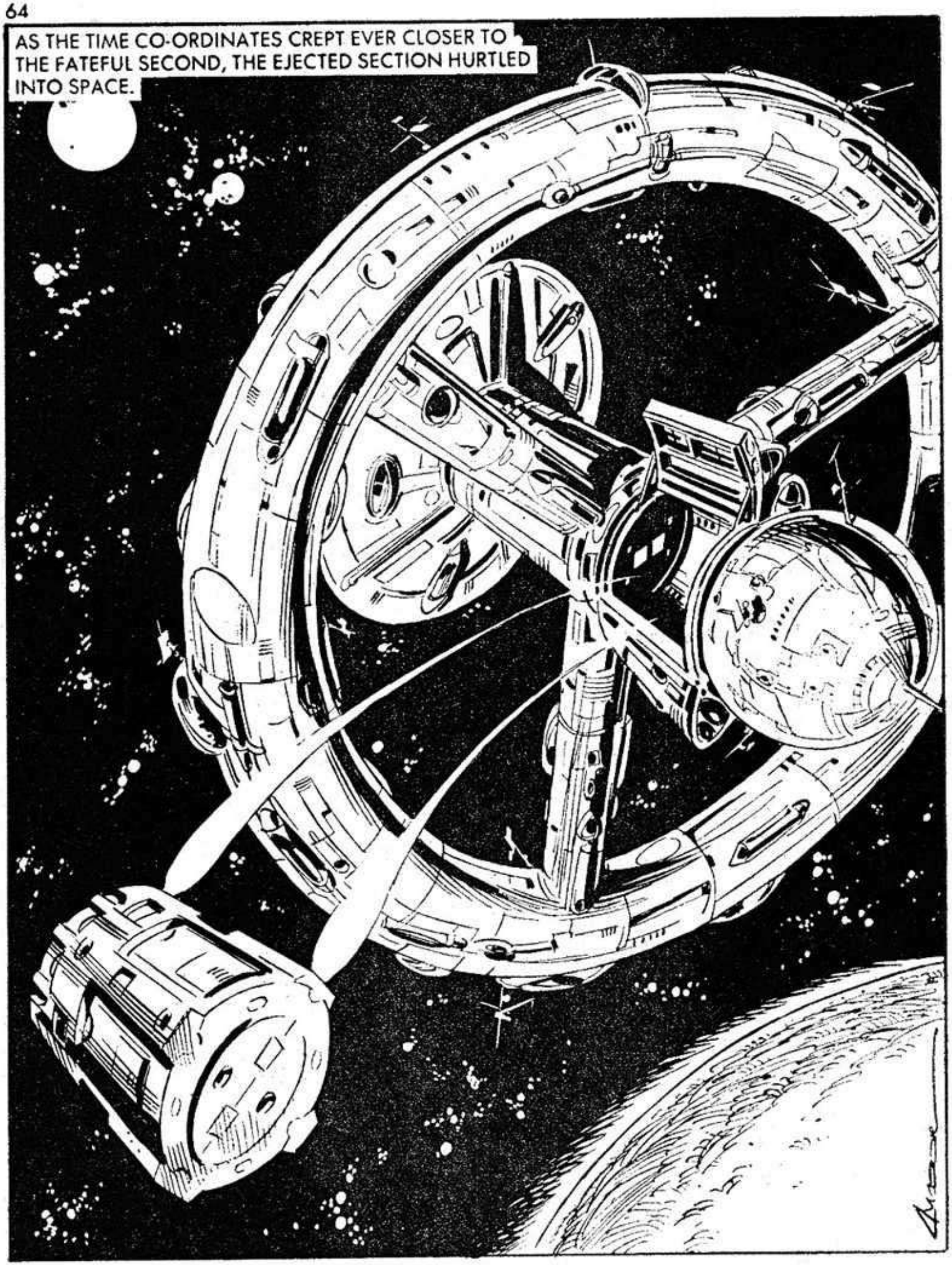

AS THEY CAME THROUGH AN AIRLOCK FROM THE DOCKING AREA —
WHAT'S GOING ON?
EMERGENCY — ONE OF THE TECHNICIAN'S HAS FLIPPED — GONE INTO THE ARGON GAS STORE WITH A LASER GUN!

THE ARGON STORE BACKS ONTO THE LAB! LET'S TRY TO GET THE PROFESSOR AND HIS ASSISTANT OUT OF THERE.
I JUST HOPE HE CAN PERSUADE TRACEY TO DROP THAT GUN.

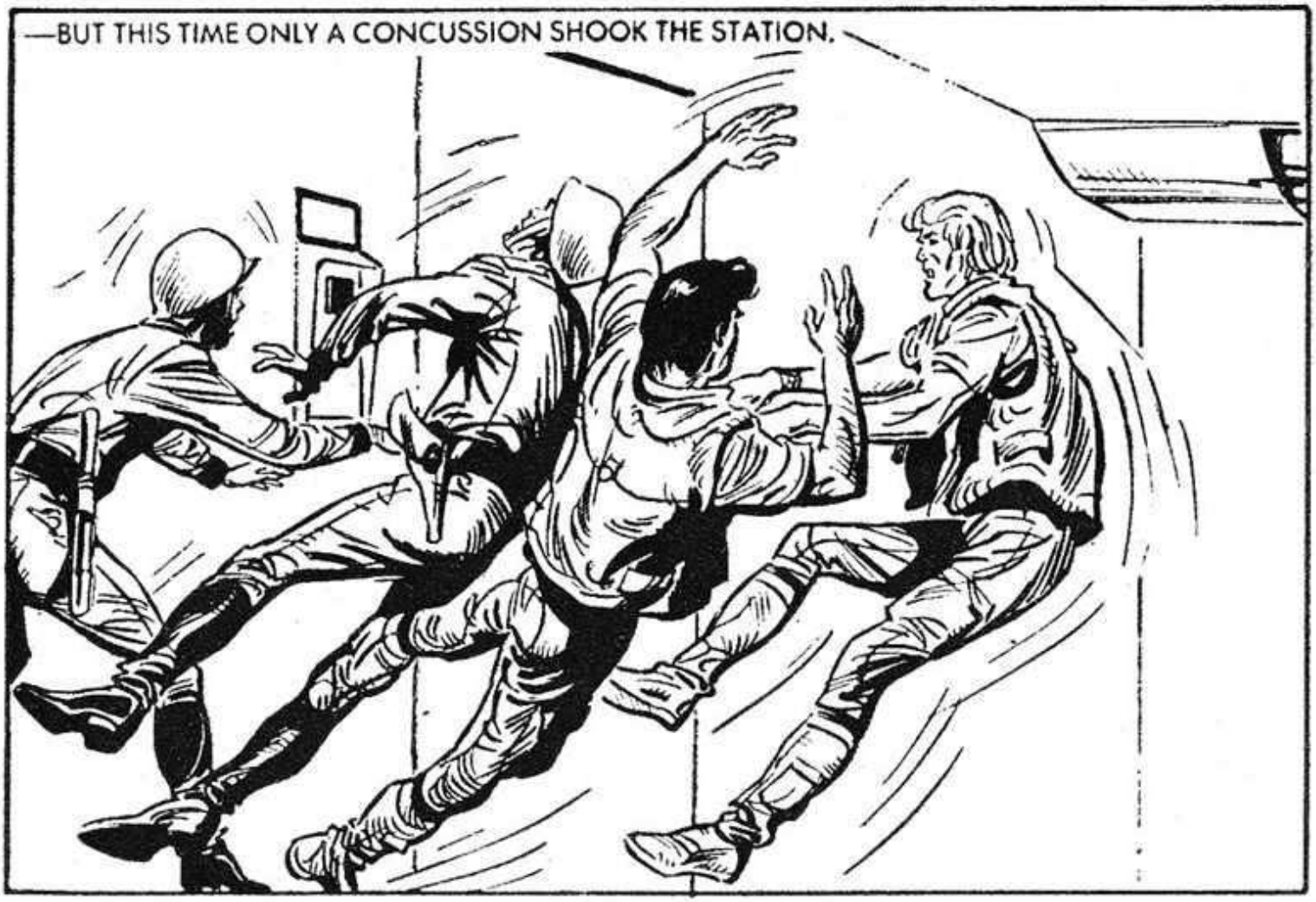

WORKING FROM SOME SUB-CONSCIOUS MEMORY, LANCE REACHED FOR THE ARGON GAS STORE RELEASE.

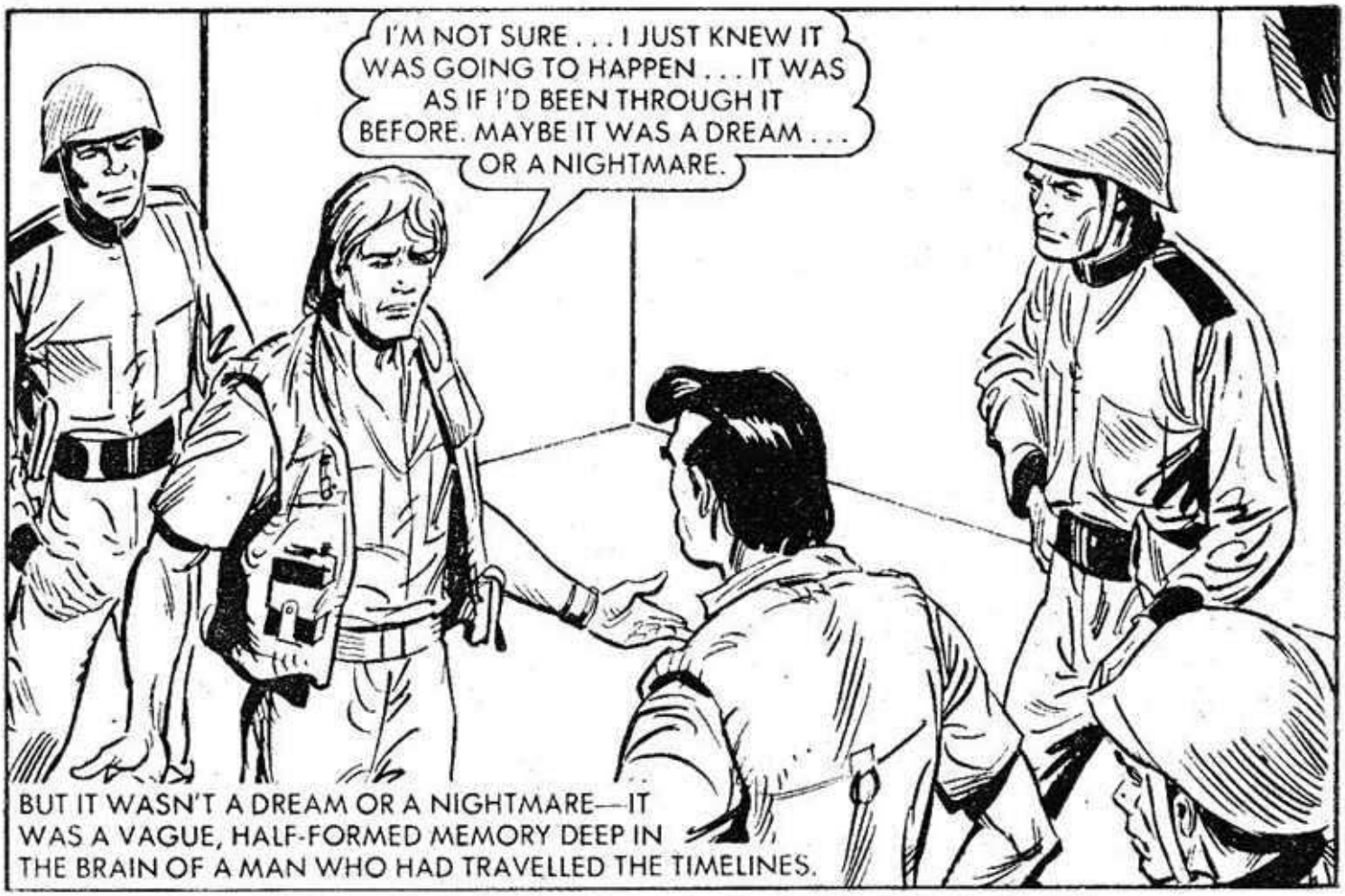
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M NOT SURE . . . IT'S LIKE A SIXTH SENSE TELLING ME TO DO SOMETHING.

EJECT
YOU MANIAC! YOU'VE EJECTED THE ARGON STORE!


AS THE TIME CO-ORDINATES CREPT EVER CLOSER TO THE FATEFUL SECOND, THE EJECTED SECTION HURTLED INTO SPACE.

YET AGAIN THE ARGON GAS STORE EXPLODED—


—BUT THIS TIME ONLY A CONCUSSION SHOOK THE STATION.



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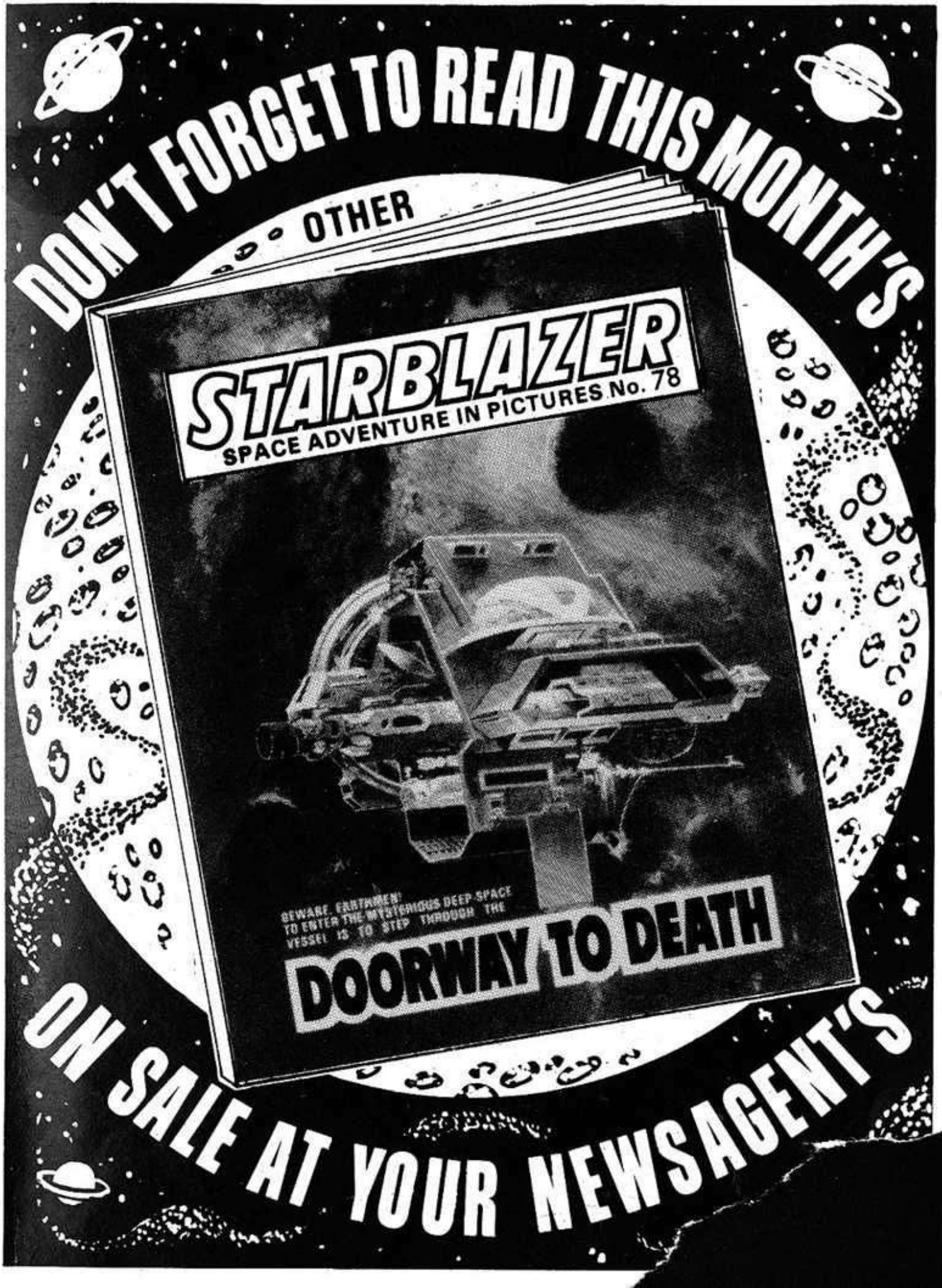
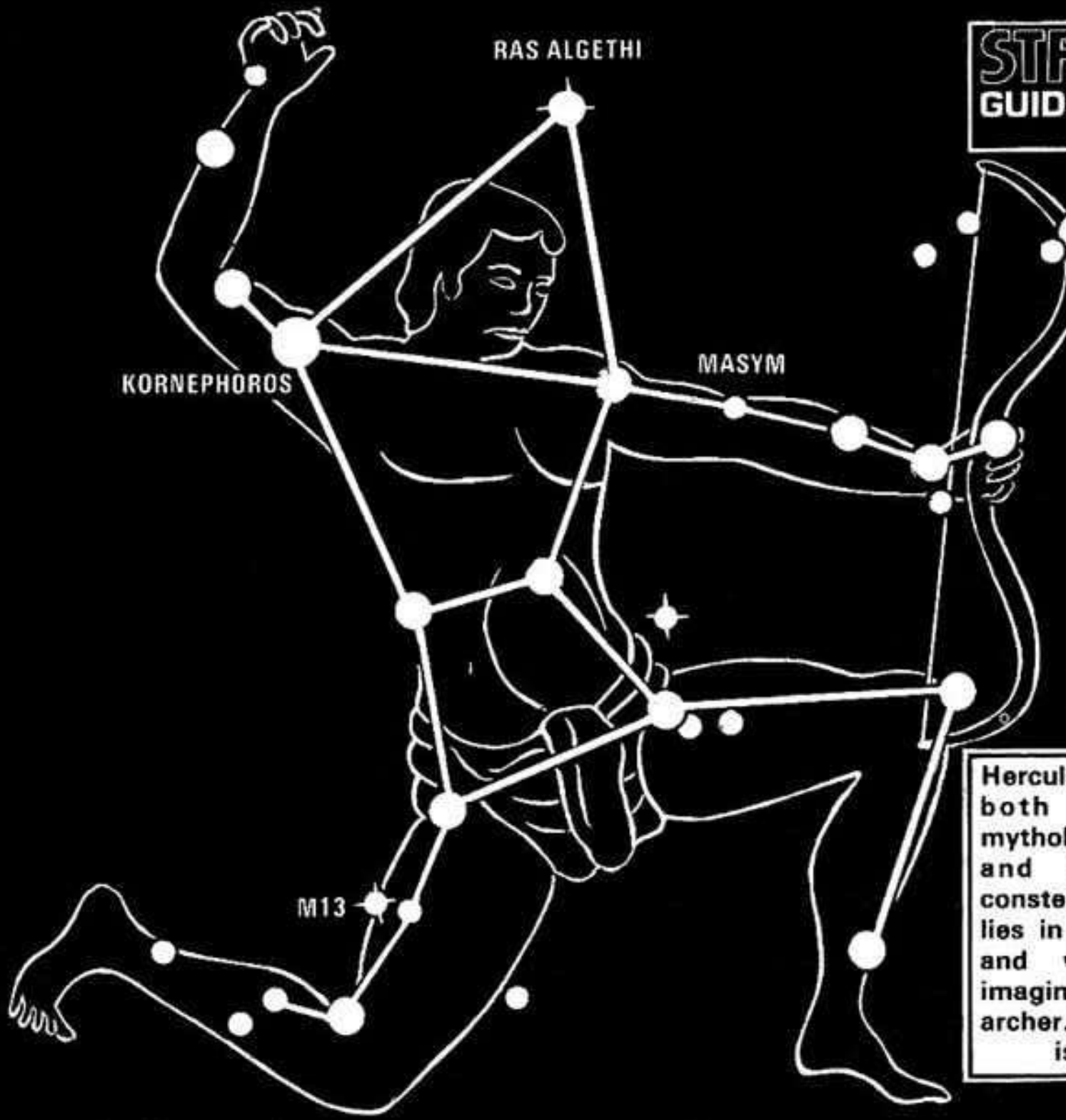

DON'T FORGET TO READ THIS MONTH'S
OTHER
STARBLAZER
SPACE ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 78
BEWARE, EARTHMEN!
TO ENTER THE MYSTERIOUS DEEP SPACE
VESSEL IS TO STEP THROUGH THE
DOORWAY TO DEATH
ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSAGENT'S

STARBLAZER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

HERCULES



Hercules was a charact
both Greek and
mythology famed for hi
and hunting abi
constellation of the
lies in the Northern
and with a gre
imagination resemb
archer. The globul
is situated in